

*Ibn 'Ata'illah*

## The Book of Wisdom

*(Kitab al-Hikam)*



## Chapter 1

He said (may God be pleased with him!):

1

One of the signs of relying on one's own deeds  
is the loss of hope when a downfall occurs.<sup>1</sup>

2

Your desire for isolation,<sup>2</sup>  
even though God has put you in the world to gain a living,  
is a hidden passion.

And your desire to gain a living in the world,  
even though God has put you in isolation,  
is a comedown from a lofty aspiration.<sup>3</sup>

3

Antecedent intentions  
cannot pierce the walls of predestined Decrees.<sup>4</sup>

4

Rest yourself from self-direction,  
for what Someone Else has carried out on your behalf  
you must not yourself undertake to do it.<sup>5</sup>

5

Your striving for what has already been guaranteed to you,  
and your remissness in what is demanded of you,  
are signs of the blurring of your intellect.<sup>6</sup>



6

If in spite of intense supplication,  
there is delay in the timing of the Gift,<sup>7</sup>  
let that not be the cause for your despairing.

For He has guaranteed you a response  
in what He chooses for you,  
not in what you choose for yourself,  
and at the time He desires, not the time you desire.

7

If what was promised does not occur,  
even though the time for its occurrence had been fixed,  
then that must not make you doubt the promise.

Otherwise your intellect will be obscured  
and the light of your innermost heart extinguished.<sup>8</sup>

8

If He opens a door for you, thereby making Himself known,  
pay no heed if your deeds do not measure up to this.

For, in truth, He has not opened it for you  
but out of a desire to make Himself known to you.

Do you not know that He is the one  
who presented the knowledge of Himself to you,  
whereas you are the one  
who presented Him with deeds?  
What a difference between  
what He brings to you and what you present to Him!<sup>9</sup>

9

Actions differ  
because the inspirations of the states of being differ.<sup>10</sup>

10

Actions are lifeless forms,  
but the presence of an inner reality of sincerity within them  
is what endows them with life-giving Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

11

Bury your existence in the earth of obscurity,  
for whatever sprouts forth,  
without having first been buried,  
flowers imperfectly.<sup>12</sup>

12

Nothing benefits the heart more than a spiritual retreat  
wherein it enters the domain  
of meditation.<sup>13</sup>

13

How can the heart be illumined  
while the forms of creatures are reflected in its mirror?<sup>14</sup>

Or how can it journey to God  
while shackled by its passions?

Or how can it desire to enter the Presence of God  
while it has not yet purified itself  
of the stain of forgetfulness?

Or how can it understand the subtle points of mysteries  
while it has not yet repented of its offenses?

14

The Cosmos is all darkness.  
It is illumined only by the manifestation of God in it.  
Whoever sees the Cosmos and does not contemplate Him  
in it or by it or before it or after it is in need of light  
and is veiled from the sun of gnosis  
by the clouds of created things.<sup>15</sup>

15

That which shows you the existence of His Omnipotence  
is that He veiled you from Himself  
by what has no existence alongside of Him.<sup>16</sup>



16

How can it be conceived that something veils Him,  
 since He is the One who manifests everything?<sup>17</sup>  
 How can it be conceived that something veils Him,  
 since He is the one who is manifest *through* everything?  
 How can it be conceived that something veils Him,  
 since He is the One who is manifest *in* everything?  
 How can it be conceived that something veils Him,  
 since He is the Manifest *to* everything?  
 How can it be conceived that something veils Him,  
 since He was the Manifest *before* the existence of anything?  
 How can it be conceived that something veils Him,  
 since He is more manifest than anything?  
 How can it be conceived that something veils Him,  
 since He is the One alongside of whom there is nothing?<sup>18</sup>  
 How can it be conceived that something veils Him,  
 since He is nearer to you than anything else?<sup>19</sup>  
 How can it be conceived that something veils Him,  
 since, were it not for Him,  
 the existence of everything would not have been manifest?  
 It is a marvel how Being has been manifested in nonbeing,  
 and how the contingent has been established  
 alongside of Him who possesses the attribute of Eternity!<sup>20</sup>

## Chapter 2

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

17

He who wishes that there appear, at a given moment,  
 other than what God has manifested in it,  
 has not left ignorance behind at all!<sup>21</sup>

18

Your postponement of deeds till the time when you are free  
 is one of the frivolities of the ego.<sup>22</sup>

19

Do not request Him to get you out of a state  
 so as to make use of you in a different one;  
 for, were He to desire so, He could make use of you  
 as you are, without taking you out!<sup>23</sup>

20

Hardly does the intention of the initiate  
 want to stop at what has been revealed to him,  
 than the voices of Reality call out to him:  
 "That which you are looking for is still ahead of you!"  
 And hardly do the exterior aspects of created beings  
 display their charms,  
 than their inner realities call out to him:  
 "We are only a trial, so disbelieve not!"<sup>24</sup>

21

Your requesting Him is suspecting Him.  
 Your seeking Him is due to your absence from Him.



Your seeking someone else  
is because of your immodesty toward Him.  
Your requesting  
someone else  
is on account of your distance from Him.<sup>25</sup>

22

Not a breath do you expire  
but a Decree of Destiny makes it go forth.<sup>26</sup>

23

Do not look forward to being free of alterities,  
for that is indeed what cuts you off from vigilant attention to  
Him  
in that very state He has assigned to you.<sup>27</sup>

24

So long as you are in this world,  
be not surprised at the existence of sorrows.  
For, truly, it manifests nothing but what is in keeping  
with its character or its inevitable nature.<sup>28</sup>

25

No search pursued with the help of your Lord  
remains at a standstill,  
but any search pursued by yourself  
will not be fruitful.

26

Among the signs of success at the end  
is the turning to God at the beginning.

27

He who is illumined at the beginning  
is illumined at the end.<sup>29</sup>

28

Whatever is deposited in the invisible world  
of innermost hearts  
is manifested in the visible world  
of phenomena.<sup>30</sup>

29

What a difference between one who proceeds *from* God  
in his argumentation  
and one who proceeds inferentially *to* Him!  
He who has Him as his starting-point knows the Real  
as It is,  
and proves any matter by reference to the Being of its  
Origin.

But inferential argumentation  
comes from the absence of union with Him.  
Otherwise, when was it that he became absent  
that one has to proceed inferentially to Him?  
Or when was it that He became distant  
that created things themselves will unite us to Him?<sup>31</sup>

30

Those who are united with Him:  
"Let him who has abundance spend out of his abundance."<sup>32</sup>

Those who are voyaging toward Him:  
"And whoever has his means of subsistence  
straitened. . . ."<sup>33</sup>

31

Those who are voyaging to Him  
are guided by the lights of their orientation,  
whereas those who are united to Him  
have the lights of face-to-face confrontation.

The former belong to their lights,  
whereas the lights belong to the latter,  
for they belong to God and to nothing apart from Him.  
"Say: *Allah!* Then leave them prattling in their vain talk."<sup>34</sup>



### Chapter 3

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

32

Your being on the lookout for the vices  
hidden within you  
is better than  
your being on the lookout for the invisible realities  
veiled from you.<sup>35</sup>

33

The Real is not veiled from you.  
Rather, it is you who are veiled from seeing It;  
for, were anything to veil It,  
then that which veils It would cover It.  
But if there were a covering to It,  
then that would be a limitation to Its Being:  
Every limitation to anything has power over it.  
"And He is the Omnipotent, above His servants."<sup>36</sup>

34

Among the attributes of your human nature,  
draw away  
from every one that is incompatible with your servanthood,  
so that you may be responsive to the call of God  
and near His Presence.

### THE BOOK OF WISDOM

35

The source  
of every disobedience, indifference, and passion  
is self-satisfaction.

The source

of every obedience, vigilance, and virtue  
is dissatisfaction with one's self.

It is better for you to keep company with an ignorant man  
dissatisfied with himself  
than to keep company with a learned man  
satisfied with himself.

For what knowledge is there in a self-satisfied scholar?  
And what ignorance is there in an unlearned man  
dissatisfied with himself?

36

The ray of light of the intellect  
makes you witness His nearness to you.  
The eye of the intellect  
makes you witness your nonbeing as due to His Being.  
The Truth of the intellect  
makes you witness His Being,  
not your nonbeing, nor your being.<sup>37</sup>

37

"God was, and there was nothing with Him,  
and He is now as He was."<sup>38</sup>



## Chapter 4

And he said (may God be pleased with Him!):

38

Let not the intention of your aspiration shift  
to what is other than He,  
for one's hopes cannot outstrip the Generous.

39

Appeal to no one but Him to relieve you of a pressing need  
that He Himself has brought upon you.  
For how can someone else remove what He has imposed?  
And how can he who is unable to free himself  
of a pressing need  
free someone else of one?

40

If you have not improved your thinking of Him  
because of His ineffable nature,  
improve it because of His treatment of you.  
For has He accustomed you to anything but what is good?  
And has He conferred upon you anything but His favors?

41

How astonishing is he who flees from what is inescapable  
and searches for what is evanescent!  
"For surely it is not the eyes that are blind,  
but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts."<sup>39</sup>

42

Travel not from creature to creature,  
otherwise you will be like a donkey at the mill:  
Roundabout he turns, his goal the same as his departure.  
Rather, go from creatures to the Creator:  
"And that the final end is unto thy Lord."<sup>40</sup>  
Consider the Prophet's words (God bless him and grant him  
peace!):  
"Therefore, he whose flight is for God and His Messenger,  
then his flight is for God and His Messenger;  
and he whose flight is for worldly gain  
or marriage with a woman,  
then his flight is for that which he flees to."  
So understand his words (upon him peace!)  
and ponder this matter, if you can.  
And peace on you!



## Chapter 5

And he said (God be pleased with him!):

43

Do not keep company  
with anyone whose state does not inspire you  
and whose speech does not lead you  
to God.

44

You might be in a bad state; then,  
associating with one who is in a worse state,  
you see virtue in yourself.

45

No deed arising from a renouncing heart is small,  
and no deed arising from an avaricious heart is fruitful.

46

Good works  
are the results of good states.

Good states  
arise from the stations wherein abide  
those who have spiritual realization.

47

Do not abandon the Invocation  
because you do not feel the Presence of God therein.  
For your forgetfulness of the Invocation of Him

is worse than your forgetfulness *in* the Invocation of Him.

Perhaps He will take you from an Invocation with  
forgetfulness

to one with vigilance, and from one with vigilance  
to one with the Presence of God, and from one with the  
Presence of God

to one wherein everything but the Invoked is absent.

"And that is not difficult for God."<sup>41</sup>



## Chapter 6

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

48

A sign of the heart's death  
is the absence of sadness  
over the acts of obedience you have neglected  
and the abandonment of regret  
over the mistakes you have made.

49

Let no sin reach such proportions in your eyes  
that it cuts you off from having a good opinion of God,  
for, indeed, whoever knows his Lord  
considers his sin as paltry next to His generosity.

50

There is no minor sin when His justice confronts you;  
and there is no major sin when His grace confronts you.

51

No deed is more fruitful for the heart  
than the one you are not aware of  
and which is deemed paltry by you.

52

He only made an inspiration come upon you  
so that you would go to him.<sup>42</sup>

53

He made an inspiration come upon you  
so as to get you out of the grip of alterities  
and free you from bondage to created things.

54

He made an inspiration come upon you  
so as to take you out of the prison of your existence  
into the unlimited space of your contemplation.

55

Lights are the riding-mounts of hearts  
and of their innermost centers.<sup>43</sup>

56

Light is the army of the heart,  
just as darkness is the army of the soul.  
So when God wishes to come to the help of His servant,  
He furnishes him with armies of lights  
and cuts off from him the reinforcements  
of darkness and alterities.

57

Insight belongs to the Light,  
discernment to the intellect,  
and both progression and retrogression belong to the heart.<sup>44</sup>

58

Let not obedience make you joyous  
because it comes from you;  
but rather, be joyous over it  
because it comes from God to you.  
"Say: In the grace of God and in His mercy,  
in that they should rejoice.  
It is better than that which they hoard."<sup>45</sup>



59

He prevents those who are voyaging to Him  
from witnessing their deeds  
and those who are united with Him  
from contemplating their states.

He does that for the voyagers because  
they have not realized sincerity toward God in those works;  
and He does that for those united with Him because  
He makes them absent from contemplating those states  
by contemplating Him.

## Chapter 7

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

60

Were it not for the seeds of ambitious desire,  
the branches of disgrace would not be lofty.

61

Nothing leads you so much like suspicion.<sup>46</sup>

62

In your despairing, you are a free man;  
but in your coveting, you are a slave.

63

Whoever does not draw near to God  
as a result of the caresses of love  
is shackled to Him with the chains of misfortune.

64

Whoever is not thankful for graces  
runs the risk of losing them;  
and whoever is thankful,  
feters them with their own cords.

65

Be fearful lest the existence of His generosity toward you  
and the persistence of your bad behavior toward Him  
not lead you step by step to ruin.  
"We shall lead them to ruin step by step  
from whence they know not."<sup>47</sup>



66

It is ignorance on the part of the novice to act improperly,  
and then, his punishment having been delayed,  
to say, "If this had been improper conduct,  
He would have shut off help and imposed exile."

Help could be withdrawn from him  
without his being aware of it,  
if only by blocking its increase.

And it could be that you are made to abide at a distance  
without your knowing it,  
if only by His leaving you to do as you like.

67

If you see a servant  
whom God has made to abide in the recitation of litanies  
and prolonged His help therein,  
do not disdain what his Lord has given him  
on the score that you do not detect the signs of gnostics on  
him  
nor the splendor of God's lovers.  
For had there been no inspiration,  
there would have been no litany.

68

God makes some people remain in the service of Him,  
and He singles out others to love Him.  
"All do we aid—these as well as those—  
out of the bounty of thy Lord,  
and the bounty of thy Lord is not limited."<sup>48</sup>

## Chapter 8

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

69

It is rare that divine inspirations come except suddenly,  
and this, so that they be protected  
from servants' claiming them  
by virtue of the existence of receptivity on their part.

70

Infer the presence of ignorance  
in anyone whom you see answering all that he is asked  
or giving expression to all that he witnesses  
or mentioning all that he knows.

71

He made the Hereafter an abode  
to reward his believing servants  
only because this world cannot contain  
what He wishes to bestow upon them  
and because He deemed their worth too high  
to reward them in a world without permanence.

72

Whoever finds the fruit of his deeds coming quickly  
has proof of the fact of acceptance.<sup>49</sup>

73

If you want to know your standing with Him,  
look at the state He has put you in now.



74

When He gives you obedience,  
making you unaware of it because of Him,  
then know that He has showered you liberally with His  
graces  
both inwardly and outwardly.

## Chapter 9

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

75

The best that you can seek from Him  
is that which He seeks from you.<sup>50</sup>

76

One of the signs of delusion  
is sadness over the loss of obedience  
coupled with an absence of resolve to bring it back to life.

77

The gnostic is not one who,  
when making a symbolic allusion,  
finds God nearer to himself than his symbolic allusion.  
Rather, the gnostic is the one who,  
because of his self-extinction in His Being  
and self-absorption in contemplating Him,  
has no symbolic allusion.<sup>51</sup>

78

Hope goes hand in hand with deeds;  
otherwise, it is just wishful thinking.

79

That which the gnostics seek from God  
is sincerity in servanthood  
and performance of the rights of Lordship.



80

He expanded you so as not to keep you in contraction;  
He contracted you so as not to keep you in expansion;  
and He took you out of both  
so that you not belong to anything apart from Him.<sup>52</sup>

81

It is more dreadful for gnostics  
to be expanded than to be contracted,  
for only a few  
can stay within the limits of proper conduct in expansion.

82

Through the existence of joy  
the soul gets its share in expansion,  
but there is no share for the soul in contraction.

83

Sometimes He gives while depriving you,  
and sometimes He deprives you in giving.

84

When he opens up your understanding of deprivation,  
deprivation becomes the same as giving.

85

Outwardly, creatures are an illusion;  
but, inwardly, they are an admonition.  
Thus, the soul looks at the illusory exterior  
while the heart looks at the admonitory interior.<sup>53</sup>

86

If you want a glory that does not vanish,  
then do not glory in a glory that vanishes.

87

The real journey  
is when the world's dimensions are rolled away from you  
so that you see the Hereafter closer to you than yourself.<sup>54</sup>

88

A gift from man is deprivation;  
but deprivation from God is beneficence.



## Chapter 10

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

89

Far be it from our Lord  
to recompense with credit  
the servant who deals with Him in cash!<sup>55</sup>

90

Suffice it  
as a recompense to you for obedience  
that He has judged you worthy of obedience.

91

It suffices as a reward for the ones who do good  
that He has inspired obedience to Him in their hearts  
and brought upon them a state of reciprocal intimacy with  
Him.

92

Whoever worships Him for something he hopes for from Him,  
or in order to stave off the arrival of chastisement,  
has not concerned himself  
with the true nature of His Attributes.

93

When He gives, He shows you His kindness;  
when He deprives, He shows you His power;  
and in all that, He is making Himself known to you  
and coming to you with His gentleness.

94

Deprivation hurts you  
only because of your incomprehension of God in it.

95

Sometimes He opens the door of obedience for you,  
but not the door of acceptance;  
or sometimes He condemns you to sin,  
and it turns out to be a cause for union with God.<sup>56</sup>

96

A disobedience that bequeathes humiliation and extreme need  
is better than an obedience that bequeathes self-infatuation and  
pride.

97

There are two graces that no being can do without  
and that are necessary for every creature:  
the grace of existence, and the grace of sustenance.

98

He bestowed His grace upon you,  
first, through giving you existence,  
and, second, through uninterrupted sustenance.

99

Your indigence belongs to you essentially,  
for accidents do not abolish essential indigence:  
The trials that arrive in this world  
are but reminders to you of what you ignore of indigence.<sup>57</sup>

100

Your best moment  
is the one wherein you witness your actual indigence  
and, through it,  
reach the reality of your lowliness.



101

When He alienates **you** from **His** creatures,  
then **know** that He wants  
to open for you the door of intimacy with Himself.

102

When He loosens **your** tongue with a request,  
then **know** that He wants to give you something.

103

The imperative need of the gnostic never vanishes,  
nor is his repose in anything but **God**.<sup>58</sup>

104

He illumined exterior **phenomena**  
with the lights of **His** created things;  
and He illumined the innermost hearts  
with the uncreated lights of His attributes.

For that reason,  
the lights of exterior phenomena set,  
whereas the lights of hearts  
—and of the innermost hearts —  
do not set.

That is why it is said, "Verily, the sun of the day sets at night,  
but the Sun of hearts never sets!"<sup>59</sup>

## Chapter 11

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

105

To soften for you the suffering of affliction,  
He has taught you  
that He is the one who causes trials to come upon you.  
For the one who confronts you with His Decrees of Fate  
is the same one who has accustomed you to His good choice.

106

Whoever supposes that His gentleness  
is separate from His Decree of Fate  
does so out of shortsightedness.

107

It is not feared  
that the ways leading to God be confusing to you;  
but rather, it is feared  
that passion overcome you.<sup>60</sup>

108

Praise be to Him  
who has hidden the inner reality of holiness  
by manifesting the quality of human nature,  
and who has appeared in the sublimity of Lordship  
by manifesting the attribute of servanthood.<sup>61</sup>



109

Do not press claims against your Lord  
because your request has been delayed;  
instead, press claims against yourself  
for slackening in your behavior.

110

When He makes you submissive to His command outwardly  
and provides you with resignation to His power inwardly,  
then He has truly enhanced the favor accorded you.

111

Not all who are most certainly among the chosen  
go on to perfect their liberation.<sup>62</sup>

## Chapter 12

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

112

Only the ignorant man scorns the recitation of litany.  
Inspiration is to be found in the Hereafter,  
while the litany vanishes with the vanishing of this world;  
but it is more fitting to be occupied with something  
for which there is no substitute.

The litany is what He seeks from you;  
the inspiration is what you seek from Him.

What comparison is there  
between what He seeks from you and what you seek from  
Him?<sup>63</sup>

113

The arrival of sustenance  
is in accordance with receptivity,  
while the raying-out of lights  
is in accordance with the purity of the innermost being.<sup>64</sup>

114

When the forgetful man gets up in the morning,  
he reflects on what he is going to do,  
whereas the intelligent man *sees* what God is doing with him.

115

The devotees and the ascetics are alienated from everything  
only because of their absence from God in everything.  
Had they contemplated Him in everything,  
they would not have been alienated from anything.<sup>65</sup>



116

He commanded you in this world  
to reflect upon His creations;  
but in the Hereafter  
He will reveal to you the perfection of His Essence.

117

When He knew that you would not renounce Him,  
He made you contemplate that which issues from Him.<sup>66</sup>

118

Since God knows of the occurrence of weariness on your  
part,  
He has varied the acts of obedience for you;  
and since He knows of the occurrence of impulsiveness in  
you,  
He has limited them to specific times,  
so that your concern be with the performance of ritual  
prayer,  
not with the existence of the ritual prayer.  
Not everyone who prays performs well.<sup>67</sup>

119

Ritual prayer is a purification for hearts  
and an opening-up of the door of the invisible domains.

120

Ritual prayer is the place of intimate conversations  
and a mine of reciprocal acts of purity  
wherein the regions of the innermost being are expanded  
and the rising gleams of light shine forth.  
He knew of the existence of weakness in you,  
so He made the number of ritual prayers small;  
and He knew of your need of His grace,  
so He multiplied their fruitful results.

121

When you seek a recompense for a deed,  
the reality of sincerity in it is demanded of you in return.  
As for the insincere,  
the feeling of security from chastisement suffices him.

122

Do not seek recompense for a deed whose doer was not you.  
It suffices you as recompense for the deed that He accepts it.<sup>68</sup>

123

When He wants to show His grace to you,  
He creates states in you and attributes them to you.<sup>69</sup>

124

Were He to make you go back to yourself,  
there would be no end to the reasons for blaming you;  
and were He to manifest His beneficence toward you,  
there would be no end to the reasons for praising you.



## Chapter 13

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

125

Cling to the attributes of His Lordship  
and realize the attributes of your servanthood!

126

He has prohibited you from claiming for yourself,  
among the qualities of created beings,  
that which does not belong to you;  
so would He permit you to lay claim to His Attribute,  
He who is the Lord of the Universe?

127

How can the laws of nature be ruptured for you  
so that miracles result,  
while you, for your part,  
have yet to rupture your bad habits?<sup>70</sup>

128

The point at issue  
is not the fact of searching;  
rather, the point at issue  
is that you be provisioned with virtuous conduct.

129

Nothing pleads on your behalf like extreme need,  
nor does anything speed gifts to you quicker  
than lowliness and want.

130

If you were to be united with Him  
only after the extinction of your vices  
and the effacement of your pretensions,  
you would never be united with Him!  
Instead, when He wants to unite you to Himself,  
He covers your attribute with His Attribute  
and hides your quality with His Quality.  
And thus He unites you to Himself  
by virtue of what comes from Him to you,  
not by virtue of what goes from you to Him.<sup>71</sup>



## Chapter 14

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

131

Were it not for the kindliness of His veiling,  
no deed would be worthy of acceptance.<sup>72</sup>

132

You are more in need of His forbearance when you obey  
Him  
than you are when you disobey Him.<sup>73</sup>

133

Veiling is of two kinds:  
veiling of disobedience, and veiling in it.  
Common people seek God's veiling  
in disobedience  
out of the fear of falling in rank among mankind.  
The elect seek the veiling of disobedience  
out of the fear of falling from the sight of God,  
the True King.

134

Whoever honors you honors only the beauty of His veil in  
you.  
Therefore, praise is to Him who veiled you,  
not to the one who honored and thanked you.<sup>74</sup>

135

No one is a friend of yours  
except the one who, while knowing your defects, is your

## THE BOOK OF WISDOM

companion,  
and that is only your generous Master.

The best one to have as a friend  
is He who does not seek you out  
for the sake of something coming from you to Him.

136

Were the light of certitude to shine,  
you would see the Hereafter so near  
that you could not move toward it,  
and you would see that the eclipse of extinction  
had come over the beauties of the world.

137

It is not the existence of any being alongside of Him  
that veils you from God,  
for nothing is alongside of Him.  
Rather, what veils you from Him  
is the illusion of a being alongside of Him.<sup>75</sup>

138

Had it not been for His manifestation in created beings,  
eyesight would not have perceived them.  
Had His Qualities been manifested,  
His created beings would have disappeared.<sup>76</sup>

139

He manifests everything  
because He is the Interior,  
and He conceals the existence of everything  
because He is the Exterior.<sup>77</sup>

140

He has permitted you to reflect  
on what is in created beings,  
but He has not allowed you to stop at the selfsame creatures.



"Say: Behold what is in the heavens and the earth!"<sup>78</sup>  
Thus, with His words "Behold what is in the heavens"  
He opened up the door of instruction for you.  
But He did not say, "Behold the heavens,"  
so as not to lead you to the mere existence of bodies.

141

The Universe is permanent through His making it  
permanent,  
and it is annihilated by the Unity of His Essence.<sup>79</sup>

## Chapter 15

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

142

People praise you for what they suppose is in you;  
but you must blame your soul for what you know is in it.

143

When the believer is praised,  
he is ashamed before God that he should be lauded  
for an attribute he does not see in himself.

144

The most ignorant of all people  
is the one who abandons the certitude he has for an opinion  
people have.

145

When He lets praise of you burst forth,  
and you are not worthy of it,  
praise Him for what He is worthy of.

146

When ascetics are praised, they are contracted,  
for they witness the praise as coming from mankind;  
but when gnostics are praised, they are expanded,  
for they witness the praise as coming from the True King.



147

If when given something, the giving expands you,  
and if when deprived of something, the deprivation contracts  
you,  
then take that as proof of your immaturity  
and the insincerity of your servanthood.

## Chapter 16

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

148

When you commit a sin,  
let that not be a reason for despairing  
of attaining to righteousness before your Lord,  
for that might be the last one decreed for you.

149

If you want the door of hope opened for you,  
then consider what comes to you from Him;  
but if you want the door of sadness opened for you,  
then consider what goes to Him from you.

150

Sometimes He makes you learn in the night of contraction  
what you have not learned in the radiance of the day of  
expansion.

"You do not know which of them is nearer to you in  
benefit."<sup>80</sup>

151

The hearts and the innermost centers of being  
are the places where lights arise.<sup>81</sup>

152

There is a light deposited in hearts  
that is nourished by the Light  
coming from the treasuries of the invisible realms.



153

There is a light  
wherewith He unveils for you His created things,  
and there is a Light  
wherewith He unveils for you His Attributes.<sup>82</sup>

154

Sometimes hearts stop at lights  
the same way souls are veiled  
by the opacities of alterities.

155

By way of honoring them,  
He veiled the lights of the innermost hearts  
with the opacities of exterior phenomena  
so that they would not be abused when expressing  
themselves  
nor be accused of seeking renown.<sup>83</sup>

## Chapter 17

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

156

Glory be to Him  
who has not made any sign leading to His saints  
save as a sign leading to Himself,  
and who has joined no one to them  
except him whom God wants to join to Himself.<sup>84</sup>

157

Sometimes He reveals to you  
the invisible domain of His Realm  
but veils you  
from knowing the secrets of servants.

158

Whoever gets to know the secrets of servants  
without patterning himself on the divine mercifulness  
finds his knowledge a tribulation  
and a cause for drawing evil upon himself.

159

The ego's share in disobedience is outwardly clear,  
while its share in obedience is inwardly hidden.  
To cure what is hidden is hard indeed!

160

Sometimes ostentation penetrates you in such a way  
that no one notices it.



161

Your desire that people know your particular distinction  
is a proof of insincerity in your servanthood.<sup>85</sup>

162

Make mankind's looking at you disappear  
by being content with God's looking at you!  
Slip away from their approach to you  
by contemplating His approach to you!

163

He who knows God contemplates Him in everything.  
He who is extinguished by Him is absent from everything.  
He who loves Him prefers nothing to Him.

164

Only His extreme nearness to you  
is what veils God from you.<sup>86</sup>

165

Only because of the intensity of His manifestation  
is He veiled,  
and only because of the sublimity of His Light  
is He hidden from view.

## Chapter 18

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

166

Let not your asking be the cause of His giving,  
for then your understanding of Him might diminish.  
Let your asking be for the sake of showing servanthood  
and fulfilling the rights of Lordship.

167

How can your subsequent asking  
be the cause of His prior giving?<sup>87</sup>

168

Far be it from the Decree of the Eternal  
to subject to contingent causes.<sup>88</sup>

169

His providential care of you  
is not due to anything coming from you.  
Where were you when He confronted you with His  
providence  
or met you face-to-face with His care?  
Neither sincerity of deeds nor the existence of states  
has any being in His Eternity.  
Instead, only pure bestowing and sublime giving are there.<sup>89</sup>

170

He knew that servants would anticipate  
the emergence of the mystery of providence in themselves,



so He said, "He chooses whom He pleases for His  
Mercy."<sup>90</sup>

And He knew that, had He left them at that,  
they would have abandoned all effort by relying on the  
Eternal,

so He said,

"Surely the Mercy of God is night to the doers of good."<sup>91</sup>

171

Everything depends on the Divine Will,  
but It Itself depends on nothing at all.<sup>92</sup>

## Chapter 19

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

172

Sometimes virtuous behavior  
leads some to abandon asking  
because of trust in His Providence  
or because concern for the Invocation of Him  
stymies their asking of Him.<sup>93</sup>

173

Only he to whom forgetfulness is possible  
is to be reminded;  
and only he to whom inattention is possible  
is to be warned.

174

The feast days of novices are when states of need arrive.<sup>94</sup>

175

Sometimes you will find more benefit in states of need  
than you will find in fasting or ritual prayer.

176

States of need are gift-laden carpets.

177

If you want gifts to come your way,  
then perfect the spiritual poverty you have.  
"Alms are only for the poor."<sup>95</sup>



178

Realize your attributes  
and He will help you with His Attributes;  
realize your lowliness  
and He will help you with His Sublimity;  
realize your impotence  
and He will help you with His Power;  
realize your weakness  
and He will help you with His Might and Force!<sup>96</sup>

## Chapter 20

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

179

Sometimes a charisma is bestowed  
upon someone whose righteousness is not perfect.<sup>97</sup>

180

A sign that it is God who has put you in a certain state  
is that He keeps you in it while its fruits mature.<sup>98</sup>

181

He who holds forth  
from the standpoint of his own virtuous behavior  
will be silenced by misbehavior toward God;  
but he who holds forth  
from the standpoint of God's virtuous behavior toward him  
will not be silenced when he misbehaves.<sup>99</sup>

182

The lights of sages precede their words,  
so that, wherever illumination occurs, there the expression  
arrives.

183

Every utterance that issues forth  
does so with the vestment of the heart from which it  
emerged.<sup>100</sup>



184

Whoever has been given permission to speak out  
will find that his expression is understood by his listeners  
and that his symbolic allusion is clear to them.

185

Sometimes the lights of inner realities will appear eclipsed  
when you have not been given permission to express them.

186

Their expression  
is either because of the overflow of ecstasy  
or for the purpose of guiding a disciple.  
The former case is that of those who are voyaging;  
the latter case is that of those who possess a function  
and have realization.<sup>101</sup>

187

An expression is nourishment to needy listeners,  
and your share in it is only what you can eat thereof.

188

Sometimes he who draws near to a station  
expresses himself about it,  
and sometimes he who is united with it  
expresses himself about it.  
That is confusing save to him who has insight.<sup>102</sup>

189

He who is voyaging should not express his inspirations,  
for that indeed diminishes their activity in his heart  
and strips him of sincerity with his Lord.<sup>103</sup>

190

Do not stretch out your hand to take from creatures  
unless you see that the Giver among them is your Lord.  
If such is the case,  
then take what knowledge says is suitable for you.<sup>104</sup>

191

Sometimes the gnostic is ashamed  
of submitting his urgent need to his Lord,  
being content with His Will.  
So why should he not be ashamed  
of submitting his urgent need to a creature of His?<sup>105</sup>



## Chapter 21

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

192

When two matters seem confusing to you,  
see which is heavier on the ego and follow it through.  
For, truly, nothing weighs on the ego but that which is true.

193

A sign of compliance with passion  
is haste in supererogatory deeds  
and sluggishness in fulfilling obligatory deeds.<sup>106</sup>

194

He laid down specific times for acts of obedience  
so that procrastination not divert you from them,  
and He made each time span ample  
so that you would have a share in making the choice.<sup>107</sup>

195

He knew of the irresolution of servants in dealing with Him,  
so He made obedience to Him obligatory for them.  
He drove them to obedience with the chains of obligation.

"Your Lord is amazed at people  
who are driven to Paradise with chains!"<sup>108</sup>

196

He made the service of Him  
obligatory upon you,

which is as much as to say that He made entry into His  
Paradise  
obligatory for you.

197

Whoever finds it astonishing  
that God should save him from his passion  
or yank him out of his forgetfulness  
has deemed the divine Power to be weak.  
"And God has power over everything."<sup>109</sup>

198

Sometimes darknesses come over you  
in order that He make you aware  
of the value of His blessings upon you.

199

He who does not know the value of graces  
when they are present  
knows their value  
when they are absent.

200

The inspirations of grace should not so dazzle you  
as to keep you from fulfilling the obligations of thankfulness,  
for that would indeed bring you down in rank.<sup>110</sup>

201

Incurable sickness results when the sweetness of passion  
takes possession of the heart.

202

Only an unsettling fear or a restless desire  
can expell passion from the heart.<sup>111</sup>



203

Just as He does not love the deed  
possessed of associationism,  
so similarly He does not love the heart  
possessed of associationism.  
As for the deed possessed of associationism,  
He does not accept it;  
and as for the heart possessed of associationism,  
He does not draw near to it.<sup>112</sup>

## Chapter 22

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

204

There are lights that are allowed to arrive  
and lights that are allowed to enter.<sup>113</sup>

205

Sometimes lights come upon you  
and find the heart stuffed with the forms of created things;  
so they go back from whence they descended.<sup>114</sup>

206

Empty your heart of alterities  
and you will fill it up with gnostic intuitions and mysteries.

207

Do not deem His giving to be slow;  
but rather, deem your approaching to be slow.

208

It is possible to fulfill some obligations at times,  
but it is impossible to fulfill the obligations of every  
moment,  
for there is no moment wherein God does not hold against  
you  
a new obligation or a definite matter.  
So how can you fulfill therein someone else's obligation  
when you have not fulfilled God's?



209

That part of your life that has gone by  
is irreplaceable,  
and that which has arrived  
is priceless.

210

You have not loved anything without being its slave,  
but He does not want you to be someone else's slave.

211

Your obedience does not benefit Him,  
and your disobedience does not harm Him.  
It is only for your own good  
that He commanded the one and prohibited the other.

212

His Sublimity is not increased  
when someone draws near to Him,  
and His Sublimity is not decreased  
when someone draws away from Him.

## Chapter 23

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

213

Your union with God is union through knowledge of Him.  
Otherwise, God is beyond being united with anything  
or anything being united with Him!<sup>115</sup>

214

Your nearness to Him is that you contemplate His nearness.  
Otherwise, what comparison is there between you and His  
nearness?

215

Inner realities arrive synthetically  
in the state of illumination,  
and after retention comes their explanation.  
"So when We recite it, follow its recitation.  
Again on us rests the explaining of it."<sup>116</sup>

216

When divine inspirations come upon you,  
they demolish your habits.  
"Surely the kings, when they enter a town, ruin it."<sup>117</sup>

217

Inspiration comes from the Presence of the Omnipotent.  
As a result, nothing opposes it without being smashed to  
bits.

"Nay, but We hurl the Truth against falsehood,  
and It prevails against it, and lo! falsehood vanishes."<sup>118</sup>



218

How can God be veiled by anything,  
for He is apparent  
and has actual being in that wherewith He is veiled?<sup>119</sup>

219

Do not lose hope  
in the acceptance of an act of yours  
wherein you found no awareness of the divine Presence.  
Sometimes He accepts an act  
the fruit of which you have not perceived right away.

220

Attest not to the validity of an inspiration  
whose fruits you know not.  
The purpose of rainclouds is not to give rain;  
their purpose is only to bring forth fruit.<sup>120</sup>

221

After the lights of inspirations have radiated forth  
and their mysteries been deposited,  
seek not their continuance,  
for you have in God one who enables you to dispense with  
everything,  
but nothing enables you to dispense with God.

222

The proof that you have not found Him  
is that you strive for the permanency of what is  
other-than-He;  
and the proof that you are not united to Him  
is that you feel estranged at the loss of what is  
other-than-He.<sup>121</sup>

## Chapter 24

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

223

While varied in its manifestations,  
felicity is only for the sake of contemplating and drawing  
near to Him;  
and, while varied in its manifestations,  
suffering is due only to the existence of His veil.  
Therefore, the existence of the veil is the cause of suffering,  
and the perfection of felicity  
is through the vision of the Countenance of God, the  
Generous.<sup>122</sup>

224

That which hearts find in the way of worries and sadnesses  
is due to that which prevents them from having inner  
vision.<sup>123</sup>

225

Part of the completeness of grace accorded you  
lies in His providing you with what suffices  
and holding you back from what makes you exceed bounds.

226

In order that your sadness over anything be little,  
let your joy over it be little.

227

If you do not want to be dismissed,  
then do not take over a post that will not always be yours.<sup>124</sup>



228

If beginnings make you desirous,  
endings will make you abstinent:  
if their exteriors invited you,  
their interiors will hold you back.<sup>125</sup>

229

He only made the world  
the place of alterities and the mine of impurities  
by way of inducing detachment toward it in you.

230

He knew you would not accept mere counsel,  
so He made you sample the world's taste to a degree  
that separation from it would be easy for you.

231

Beneficial knowledge  
is the one whose ray of light expands in the mind  
and uncovers the veil over the heart.<sup>126</sup>

232

The best knowledge is the one accompanied by fear.<sup>127</sup>

233

If fear is united with knowledge, then it is for you;  
if not, then it is against you.

234

When it pains you that people do not come to you,  
or that they do so with rebukes,  
then return to the knowledge of God in you.  
But if the knowledge of Him in you does not satisfy you,  
then your affliction at *not* being content with that knowledge  
is greater than your affliction at the pain coming from  
people.

235

He only made affliction come at the hands of people  
so that you not repose in them.  
He wants to drive you out of everything  
so that nothing would divert you from Him.

236

If you know that the devil does not forget you,  
then do not, for your part,  
forget Him who has your forelock in His hand.

237

He made the devil your enemy  
so that, through him, He could drive you toward Himself,  
and He stirred up your soul against you  
so that your drawing near to Him would be permanent.



## Chapter 25

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

238

He who attributes humility to himself is really proud,  
for humility arises only out of a loftiness;  
so, when you attribute humility to yourself, then you are  
proud.<sup>128</sup>

239

The humble man is not the one  
who, when humble, sees that he is above what he does;  
instead, the humble man is the one  
who, when humble, sees that he is below what he does.<sup>129</sup>

240

Real humility is the one that arises  
from the contemplation of His Sublimity  
and the illumination of His Attribute.<sup>130</sup>

241

Only the contemplation of His Attribute  
can dislodge you from your attribute.

242

The believer  
is he who is diverted from extolling himself  
by the praise of God,  
and who is diverted from remembering his good fortune  
by the fulfillment of God's rights.<sup>131</sup>

243

The lover is not the one  
who hopes for a recompense from his beloved  
or seeks some object.

In truth, the lover is the one  
who spends generously on you,  
not the one on whom you spend generously.

244

Were it not for the arenas of the soul,  
the voyaging of the adepts could not be realized:  
There is no distance between you and Him  
that could be traversed by your journey,  
nor is there any particle between you and Him  
that could be effaced by your union with Him.<sup>132</sup>

245

He put you in the intermediary world  
between His Kingdom and His Realm  
to teach you the majesty of your rank  
among His created beings  
and that you are a jewel  
wherein the pearls of His creations are hidden.<sup>133</sup>

246

The Cosmos envelops you  
in respect to your corporeal nature,  
but it does not do so  
in respect to the immutability of your spiritual nature.  
So long as the domains of the Invisible Worlds  
have not been revealed to him,  
the creature in the Cosmos is imprisoned by his  
surroundings  
and confined in the temple of his nature.<sup>134</sup>



247

So long as you have not contemplated the Creator,  
 you belong to created beings;  
 but when you have contemplated Him,  
 created beings belong to you.

248

The permanence of sanctity does not necessitate  
 that the attribute of human nature be nonexistent.  
 Sanctity is analogous to the illumination of the sun in  
 daytime:

It appears on the horizon but it is not a part of it.  
 Sometimes the suns of His Attributes shine  
 in the night of your existence,  
 and sometimes He takes that away from you  
 and returns you to your existence.  
 So daytime is not from you to you,  
 but instead, it comes upon you.<sup>135</sup>

249

By the existence of His created things,  
 He points to the existence of His Names,  
 and by the existence of His Names,  
 He points to the existence of His Qualities,  
 and by the existence of His Qualities,  
 He points to the reality of His Essence,  
 for it is impossible for a quality to be self-subsistent.  
 He reveals the perfection of His Essence  
 to those who have attraction;  
 then He turns them back  
 to the contemplation of His Qualities;  
 then He turns them back  
 to dependence on His Names;  
 and then He turns them back  
 to the contemplation of His created things.

The contrary is the case for those who are initiates:

The end for those progressing  
 is the beginning for the ecstasies,  
 and the beginning for those progressing  
 is the end for the ecstasies.  
 But this is not to be taken literally,  
 since both might meet in the Path,  
 one in his descending, the other in his ascending.<sup>136</sup>

250

It is only in the invisible world of the Realm  
 that the value of the lights of hearts  
 and innermost centers of being is known,  
 just as the lights of the sky do not manifest themselves  
 except in the visible world of the Kingdom.<sup>137</sup>

251

For those who do good,  
 finding the fruits of the acts of obedience in this world  
 is glad tidings of their reward in the Hereafter.<sup>138</sup>

252

How can you seek recompense  
 for a deed He bestowed upon you out of charity?  
 Or how can you seek recompense  
 for a sincerity He gave you as a gift?

253

The lights of some people precede their invocations,  
 while the invocations of some people precede their lights.  
 There is the invoker who invokes so that his heart be  
 illumined;  
 and there is the invoker whose heart has been illumined—  
 and he invokes.<sup>139</sup>



254

The exterior of invocation would not exist  
were it not for the interior of contemplation and  
meditation.<sup>140</sup>

255

He made you witness before He asked you to give witness:  
Thus, the outer faculties speak of His Divinity  
while the heart and the innermost consciousness  
have realized His Unity.

256

He ennobled you with three charismatic gifts:  
He made you an invoker of Him,  
and had it not been for His grace,  
you would not have been worthy of the flow  
of the invocation of Him in you;  
He made you remembered by Him  
inasmuch as He confirmed His relationship to you;  
and He made you remembered by those with Him,  
thereby perfecting His grace upon you.<sup>141</sup>

257

Many a life is long in years but meager in fruits,  
and many a life is short in years but rich in fruits.

258

He who has been blessed in life  
attains, in a short time, to such gifts from God  
that no expression or symbolic allusion could describe.

259

It would be disappointing—really disappointing!—  
if you were to find yourself free of distractions  
and then not make toward Him,

or if you were to have few obstacles  
and then not move on to Him!

260

Meditation is the voyage of the heart  
in the domains of alterities.

261

Meditation is the lamp of the heart;  
so when it goes away, the heart has no illumination.

262

Meditation is of two kinds:  
the meditation of belief and faith,  
and the meditation of contemplation and vision.  
The first is for the adepts of reflective thought,  
the second is for the adepts of contemplation  
and intellectual vision.<sup>142</sup>



## *The First Treatise*

Among the things he wrote to some of his friends, he said (may God be pleased with him!):

Now then, beginnings are the places where endings are revealed, so that whoever begins with God ends up with Him. He is the one you love and rush to in whatever occupies you, and He is the one you prefer in whatever you turn away from. Whoever is certain that God seeks him is sincere in seeking Him. He who knows that all matters are in God's hands is recollected through trust in Him. Truly, it is inevitable that the pillars of this world's house of existence be destroyed and its precious things be stripped away. For the intelligent man is more joyous over the permanent than he is over the evanescent. His lights shine forth, glad tidings have come to him. Thus, he turns away from this world, takes no notice of it, shuns it altogether. He does not therefore take it as a homeland, nor does he turn it into a home, but rather, while in it, he arouses his fervor toward God and seeks His help in going toward Him. His determination, a riding-mount, is restless and ever on the move till it comes to kneel down in the Presence of the Holy on the carpet of intimacy, the place of reciprocal disclosure, confrontation, companionship, conversation, contemplation, and looking.

The Presence is the nesting place of the hearts of initiates: They take refuge in it and dwell therein. Then, when they descend to the heaven of obligations and the earth of varied fortune, they do so with authority, stability, and profundity of certitude. For they have not descended to obligations through improper conduct or forgetfulness, nor to fortune through passion and pleasure; but instead they have entered therein by God and for God and from God and to God.

"And say: My Lord, make me enter a truthful entering, and make me go forth a truthful going forth,"<sup>143</sup> so that I will see Your strength and power when You make me enter, and will submit and conform myself to You when You make me go out. Give me an authority from You, an ally that helps me or that helps others through me, but not one that goes against me: one that helps me against self-regard and extinguishes me from the realm of my senses.



## *The Second Treatise*

Among the things that he wrote to some of his friends, he said (may God be pleased with him!):

If the eye of the heart sees that God is One in His blessings, the Law requires nevertheless that thanks be given to His creatures.

Indeed, in the matter of blessings, people fall into three classes. The first is that of the forgetful person, immersed in his forgetfulness, strong in the domain of his senses, blurred in inner vision. He sees generosity as coming from mankind and does not contemplate it as coming from the Lord of the Universe, either out of conviction, in which case his associationism is evident, or else out of dependence, in which case his associationism is hidden.<sup>144</sup>

The second is that of the possessor of a spiritual reality who, by contemplating the True King, is absent from mankind, and who, by contemplating the Cause of effects, is extinguished from the effects. He is a servant brought face to face with Reality, the splendor of which is apparent in him. A traveler in the Path, he has mastered its extent, except that he is drowned in lights and does not perceive created things. His inebriety prevails over his sobriety, his union over his separation, his extinction over his permanence, and his absence over his presence.

The third is that of a servant who is more perfect than the second: He drinks, and increases in sobriety; he is absent, and increases in presence; his union does not veil him from his separation, nor does his separation veil him from his union; his extinction does not divert him from his permanence, nor does his permanence divert him from his extinction. He acts justly toward everyone and gives everyone his proper due.<sup>145</sup>

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq said to A'isha, when her innocence was revealed through the tongue of the Prophet,<sup>146</sup> "O A'isha, be grateful to the Messenger of God!" Then she said, "By God, I will be grateful only to God!" Abu Bakr had pointed out to her the more perfect station, the station of permanence that requires the recognition of created things. God says, "Give thanks to Me and to thy parents."<sup>147</sup> And the Prophet said, "He who does not thank mankind does not thank God." At that time she was extinguished from her external senses, absent from created things, so that she contemplated the One, the Omnipotent.



### *The Third Treatise*

He said (may God be pleased with him!):

When he was asked with regard to the Prophet's words, "And my eye's refreshment has been made to be in ritual prayer," whether that was particular to the Prophet or whether anyone else had a share or part in it, he answered:<sup>148</sup>

In truth, the eye's refreshment through contemplation is commensurate with the gnosis of the Object of contemplation. The gnosis of the Messenger is not like the gnosis of someone else; accordingly, someone else's refreshment of eye is not like his.

We have said that the refreshment of his eye in his ritual prayer was through his contemplating the Majesty of the Object of contemplation only because he himself indicated as much by his words, "in ritual prayer." For he did not say, "by means of ritual prayer," since his eye was not refreshed by means of something other than his Lord. How could it be otherwise? For he points to this station, and commands others to realize it, with his words, "Adore God as if you were seeing Him," since it would have been impossible for him to see Him and at the same time to witness someone other than He alongside of Him.

Suppose someone were to say, "The refreshment of the eye can be by means of ritual prayer because it is a grace of God and emerges from God's blessing itself. So, how is it one cannot ascend by means of it, or how is it the eye's refreshment cannot be had by means of it? For God says, 'Say: In the grace of God and in His mercy, in that they should rejoice.'"<sup>149</sup>

If that were said, then you must know that the significance of the verse, for those who meditate on the secret of the state-

ment, is to be found in the main clause, for He says, "in that they should rejoice," and not, "in that you should rejoice, O Muhammad." In other words, "Say to them: Let them rejoice by means of generous acts and kindness, but let *your* rejoicing be with Him who is kind," just as, in another verse, He says, "Say: *Allah!* Then leave them prattling in their vain talk."<sup>150</sup>



## *The Fourth Treatise*

Among the things he wrote to some of his friends, he said (may God be pleased with him!):

With regard to the advent of blessings, people are of three categories. To the first belongs the one who rejoices at blessings, not in respect to their Bestower or Originator, but in respect to his pleasure in them. This man belongs to the forgetful, and God's words hold true for him: "Until, when they rejoiced in what they were given, We seized them suddenly."<sup>151</sup>

To the second category belongs the one who rejoices at blessings inasmuch as he sees them as blessings from Him who sent them or as grace from Him who brought it to him. God refers to him with His words: "Say: In the grace of God and in His mercy, in that they should rejoice. It is better than that which they hoard."<sup>152</sup>

To the third category belongs the one who rejoices in God. Neither the exterior pleasure of blessings nor their interior graces divert him. Instead, his vision of God, his concentration on Him, divert him from what is other-than-His, so that he contemplates only Him. God refers to him with his words: "Say: *Allah!* Then leave them prattling in their vain talk."<sup>153</sup> God revealed to David: "O David, say to the truthful: Let them rejoice in Me, let them find joy in My invocation!"<sup>154</sup>

May God make your joy and ours in Him and in the contentment that comes from Him; may He put us among those who understand Him; may He not put us among the forgetful; and may He voyage with us in the path of the God-fearing with His grace and generosity!

## *Intimate Discourses*

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

1

My God,  
I am poor in my richness,  
so why should I not be poor in my poverty?<sup>155</sup>

2

My God,  
I am ignorant in my knowledge,  
so why should I not be most ignorant in my ignorance?

3

My God,  
the diversity of Your planning  
and the speed of Your predestined Decrees  
prevent Your servants, the gnostics,  
from relying on gifts or despairing of You during trials.<sup>156</sup>

4

My God,  
from me comes what is in keeping with my miserliness,  
and from You comes what is in keeping with Your  
generosity.

5

My God,  
You have attributed to Yourself  
gentleness and kindness toward me



before the existence of my weakness;  
so, would You then hold them back from me  
after the existence of my weakness?<sup>157</sup>

6

My God,  
if virtues arise from me,  
that is because of Your grace:  
It is Your right to bless me.  
And if vices arise from me,  
that is because of Your justice:  
It is Your right to have proof against me.

7

My God,  
how can You leave me to myself,  
for You are responsible for me?  
And how could I be harmed while You are my Ally?  
Or how could I be disappointed in You, my Welcomer?  
Here I am seeking to gain access to You  
by means of my need of You.  
How could I seek to gain access to You  
by means of what cannot possibly reach you?  
Or how can I complain to You of my state,  
for it is not hidden from You?  
Or how can I express myself to You in *my* speech,  
since it comes from You and goes forth to You?  
Or how can my hopes be dashed,  
for they have already reached You?  
Or how can my states not be good,  
for they are based on You and go to You?

8

My God,  
how gentle You are with me

in spite of my great ignorance,  
and how merciful You are with me  
in spite of my ugly deeds!

9

My God,  
how near You are to me,  
and how far I am from You!

10

My God,  
how kind You are to me!  
So what is it that veils me from You?

11

My God,  
from the diversity of created things  
and the changes of states,  
I know that it is Your desire  
to make Yourself known to me in everything  
so that I will not ignore You in anything.

12

My God,  
whenever my miserliness makes me dumb,  
Your generosity makes me articulate,  
and whenever my attributes make me despair,  
Your grace gives me hope.

13

My God,  
if someone's virtues are vices,  
then why cannot his vices be vices?  
And if someone's inner realities are pretensions,  
then why cannot his pretensions be pretensions?<sup>158</sup>



14

My God,  
Your penetrating decision and Your conquering will  
have left no speech to the articulate  
nor any state to him who has one!

15

My God, how often has Your justice destroyed  
the dependence I built upon obedience  
or the state I erected!  
Yet, it was Your grace that freed me of them.

16

My God,  
You know that,  
even though obedience has not remained a resolute action  
on my part,  
it has remained as a love and a firm aspiration.

17

My God,  
how can I resolve  
while You are the Omnipotent,  
or how can I *not* resolve  
while you are the Commander?

18

My God,  
my wavering among created things  
inevitably makes the Sanctuary distant,  
so unite me to You by means of a service that leads me to  
You.

19

My God,  
how can one argue inferentially of You

by that which depends on You for its existence?  
Does anything other than You manifest what You do *not*  
have,

so that it becomes the manifester *for* You?  
When did You become so absent that You are in need of a  
proof giving evidence of You?

And when did You become so distant  
that it is created things themselves that lead us to You?<sup>159</sup>

20

My God,  
blind is the eye  
that does not see You watching over it,  
and vain is the handclasp of a servant  
who has not been given a share of Your love.

21

My God,  
You have commanded me to return to created things,  
so return me to them with the raiment of lights  
and the guidance of inner vision,  
so that I may return from them to You  
just as I entered You from them,  
with my innermost being protected from looking at them  
and my fervor raised above dependence on them.  
"Truly, over everything You are the Omnipotent."<sup>160</sup>

And he said (may God be pleased with him!):

22

My God,  
here is my lowliness manifest before You,  
and here is my state unhidden from You.  
I seek from You union with You.  
I proceed from You in my argumentation about You.



So guide me to You with Your light  
and set me up before You through sincerity of servanthood!

23

My God,  
make me know by means of Your treasured-up Knowledge,  
and protect me by means of the mystery  
of Your well-guarded Name.<sup>161</sup>

24

My God,  
make me realize the inner realities  
of those drawn nigh,  
and make me voyage in the path  
of those possessed by attraction.<sup>162</sup>

25

My God,  
through Your direction  
make me dispense with self-direction,  
and through Your choosing for me  
make me dispense with my choosing;  
and make me stand in the very center of my extreme need.

26

My God,  
pull me out of my self-abasement  
and purify me of doubting and associationism  
before I descend into my grave.  
I seek Your help, so help me.  
In You I trust, so entrust me to no one else.  
You do I ask, so do not disappoint me.  
Your kindness do I desire, so do not refuse me.  
It is to You that I belong, so do not banish me.  
And it is at Your door that I stand, so do not cast me away.

27

My God,  
Your Contentment is too holy  
for there to be a cause for it in You,  
so how can there be a cause for it in me?  
Through Your Essence,  
You are independent of any benefit coming to You,  
so why should You not be independent of me?<sup>163</sup>

28

My God,  
destiny and the Decree of Fate have overcome me,  
and desire with its passional attachments  
has taken me prisoner.  
Be my Ally so that You may help me and others through  
me.  
Enrich me with Your kindness,  
so that, content with You,  
I can do without asking for anything.  
You are the one who makes the lights shine in the hearts of  
Your saints  
so that they know You and affirm Your Oneness.  
You are the one who makes alterities disappear  
from the hearts of Your lovers  
so that they love none but You and take refuge in none but  
You.  
You are the one who befriends them  
when the world makes them forlorn.  
You are the one who guides them  
till the landmarks become clear for them.  
He who has lost You—what has he found?  
He who has found You—what has he lost?  
Whoever takes someone other than You as a substitute  
is disappointed,



and whoever wants to stray away from You  
is lost.

29

My God,

how could hope be placed in what is other than You,  
for You have not cut off Your benevolence?

And how could someone other than You be asked,  
for You have not changed the norms for conferring  
blessings?

O He who makes His beloved friends taste  
the sweetness of intimacy with Himself

so that they stand before Him with praise,

and O He who clothes His saints

with the vestments of reverential fear toward Himself  
so that they stand glorifying His glory —

You are the Invoker prior to invokers,

You are the Origin of benevolence prior to servants turning  
to You,

You are the Munificent in giving prior to the asking of  
seekers,

and You are the Giver who,  
in respect to what You have given us,  
asks us for a loan!

30

My God,

seek me with Your grace

so that I may reach You,

and attract me with Your blessings

so that I may draw near to You.

31

My God,

my hope is not cut off from You

even though I disobey You,  
just as my fear does not leave me  
even though I obey You.

32

My God,

the world has pushed me toward You,  
and my knowledge of Your generosity has made me stand  
before You.

33

My God,

how could I be disappointed while You are my hope,  
or how could I be betrayed while my trust is in You?

34

My God,

how can I deem myself exalted  
while You have planted me in lowliness,  
or why should I *not* deem myself exalted,  
for You have related me to Yourself?  
Why should I not be in need of You,  
for You have set me up in poverty,  
or why should I be needy,  
for You have enriched me with Your goodness?

Apart from You there is no God.

You have made Yourself known to everything  
so nothing is ignorant of You.

And it is You who have made Yourself known to me in  
everything;

thus, I have seen You manifest *in* everything,  
and You are the Manifest *to* everything.

O He who betakes Himself to His throne

with His All-Mercifulness,

so that the throne is hidden in His All-Mercifulness,



just as the Universe is hidden in His throne,  
You have annihilated created things with created things,  
and obliterated alterities with the all-encompassing spheres of  
light!<sup>164</sup>

O He who, in His pavilions of glory,  
is veiled from the reach of sight,

O He who illumines with the perfection of His Beauty  
and whose Infinity is realized by the gnostics' innermost  
being—

how can You be hidden, for You are the Exterior?<sup>165</sup>

Or how can You be absent,  
for You are the Ever-Present Watcher?

God is the Granter of Success—and in Him I take refuge!

## Notes



1. One should be detached toward one's actions, not attached to their positive or negative fruits. We must rely on the Divinity, not on our own actions or deeds. According to one of the commentators, the person who relies on God suffers no diminution of hope when he falls into disobedience nor does his hope increase when he performs a virtuous deed.

2. The word for "isolation" in Arabic is *tajrid*, which carries with it the implication of withdrawing from society for contemplative aims, the one doing so being called a *mutajarrid*, whereas the one who carries on his contemplative life within society is the *mutasabbib*, that is to say, he is concerned also with his livelihood (*sabab*) in the world.

3. It is not a matter of choice, it is a question of vocation, predetermined by the general tendencies of the individual. One might add that the spiritual master (*Shaykh*) of a Sufi order likewise controls the eventual orientation of the *faqir*.

4. Whatever might be one's prior intentions or aspirations (*himam*, plural of *himmah*), they cannot set aside what Destiny has decreed must take place. The anteriority in time of the intention is likened to an arrow, as it were, that cannot pierce the walls of Destiny, which represent the fixity of predestined Decrees. Nevertheless, the gnostic's intention or aspiration can be so strong for a given thing that it coincides with the divine Will, which actualizes it immediately, according to Ibn 'Ajibah, one of the commentators.

5. Self-direction (*tadbir*) implies egocentric concern for one's direction in life, and more particularly in one's daily existence, to the point where it blots out the obligations due to God. In that case, the *tadbir* is negative and should be eliminated. But if the planning or direction is in conjunction with the directives of God, then it is positive and not an obstacle in the Path, in which case it is not self-direction, or an egocentric manifestation, but Self-direction, which is not in the least individualistic. It is not so much that all future planning should be set to one side as it is that one should repose in the knowledge that one's future has been taken care of by providential arrangements: One has but to flow into the divine mould that has already been prepared.

6. This is similar to what Hikmah no. 4 points to, but it carries things a step further. The seeker's livelihood in this world is already guaranteed to him by Providence: One should flow along with it without undue strain. If such strain is present and forces the seeker to be remiss in his

obligations, such as the daily rituals, his discernment is eventually curtailed.

7. The "Gift" is the celestial response to the *faqir*, the "sign" that he is making headway.

8. Both no. 6 and no. 7 treat of the same thing: one must not give way to despair or doubt if things do not go according to one's own choice, for this can cloud the inner eye of the heart.

9. There is no common measure between the insignificant deeds of the traveler in the Path and the immense results obtained at its end. God may suddenly intervene with intrusions of Self-revelation that seem disproportionately great in relation to the deeds of the individual.

10. Inspiration (*warid*) affects the spiritual state (*hal*) of the soul in terms of expansion, contraction, intimacy with God, and the like; but these are all interior states of being that nevertheless manifest themselves in exterior actions. These actions are the expressions, necessarily varied, of the different interior states.

11. Actions untouched by sincerity, in the spiritual sense of that term, are dead forms; but let sincerity penetrate them and it is as if the Spirit had brought life into them.

12. The "earth of obscurity" here is self-effacement, the opposite of all individualism that bloats the ego.

13. Meditation (*fikrah*) is a kind of flow of thoughts on the attributes of the Absolute that introduces a state of concentration in the mind, thus purifying it and allowing its deeper layers of luminosity to rise to the surface.

14. The "heart" is not only the luminous center where the ray of the Spirit meets the plane of the soul, but also, in fallen man, it is the seat of passions, sentiments, and ignorance. The combat that takes place in the contemplative life is between the transcendent Spirit and the egocentric soul, to determine which shall govern the heart. To the extent that the Spirit prevails, the heart is illumined. The polishing of the mirror of the heart, a favorite expression in Sufism, involves cleansing it of all that is other-than-God. Man's fallen nature covers or veils the eye of the heart, which is the Spirit, with multiplicity, or "the forms of creatures," preventing its inherent luminosity from radiating throughout the soul. This entire Hikmah points out the contradictions in those who would unite with God while still subject to the effects of the Fall (*al-hubut*).

15. The darkness of the Cosmos symbolizes its nonexistence, its nothingness. Whatever exists, therefore, derives its being from God, the origin of all things. Not to see this unique divine Source behind the multiplicity of things implies the "veiling" of one's intelligence: So long as this



veiling persists, the eye of the heart (*‘ayn al-qalb*) cannot function normally and the solar nature of gnosis (*ma‘rifah*) cannot shine forth from one's inner being. Note the equation of darkness with nothingness, light with existence or being.

16. The Omnipotence of the Divinity is Its creative art that has the power to bring the entire universe into being while at the same time effecting an apparent separation between the Creator and the Creation, a separation that is only illusory in the sense that it is not absolutely so. Without the divine Omnipotence, the world could not have come into being; without the separative tendency, the Real (*al-Haqq*) and the Creation (*al-Khalq*) would not be distinct; but this distinction is only relatively true, for they are essentially identical. That being so, the idea that the Creation—as a cosmos or universe—has a separate reality alongside that of the Real is an illusion, a “veiling,” a failure to perceive things with the eye of the heart, for there cannot be two ultimate Realities, which would be contrary to the basic Islamic thesis of *tawhid*, the affirmation of the Oneness of the Absolute, *Allah*. To affirm that there is something that has coexistence with God in an absolute manner is to fall into *shirk*, or “associationism,” which is to assert that *Allah*, who is One, has associates or partners or peers. Still, the power of the world to veil the individual from God derives from the divine Omnipotence itself, which could not but bring into existence a world that is other-than-God, which has “no existence alongside of Him.”

17. This Hikmah proceeds to smash the illusion mentioned in no. 15, except that the origin of the veiling there is in God's Omnipotence, whereas here the origin is in the individual as such, who does not see that nothing whatsoever can veil the One. One of the ninety-nine Names of the Divinity in Islam is *az-Zahir* (“the Exterior,” “the Manifest”), which is the opposite of another Name, *al-Batin* (“the Interior,” “the Unmanifest”). This Hikmah takes the entire world as proceeding from the reality of the Name *az-Zahir*. Nothing could be more manifest than the Manifest, who is God.

18. If there were something alongside of Him, He would not be the One, for there would then be two realities, or three, or four, and so forth. Not to see the One in all things, in all multiplicity, is spiritual *shirk* and therefore the opposite of *tawhid*. Let us recall that *shirk* is the cardinal sin in Islam, although it is true that, on the exoteric plane of the Law, it is not defined in the esoteric Sufi sense, which has in view its contemplative and spiritual and even metaphysical ramifications and consequences, whereas in ordinary Islam *shirk* has to do with polytheism in the paganistic sense, *tawhid* being the affirmation of *Allah* as the One and the rejection of idols. One can see that in exoteric Islam a mild or even serious form of spiritual *shirk* can exist alongside the official *tawhid*; and it is no doubt for this reason that Sufism, making no concessions to hypocritical tendencies, insists on

total *tawhid*, with no residues of *shirk* lurking in the human psyche to act as blocks to the contemplative life. Sufi esoterism is the sacred science of total *tawhid*, whereas Islamic exoterism is but fragmentary *tawhid*: This is the difference between the Path (*tariqah*) and the Law (*shari‘ah*) as generally understood by the Sufis, who nevertheless recognize that both emanate from the same Reality (*Haqiqah*). Sufism pictures the *Haqiqah* as the central point in a circle; the radius connecting the point to the circle is the *tariqah*; the circle itself is the *shari‘ah*. One cannot tread the Path without the Law, the latter providing an initial and provisional version of *tawhid* which the Path (i.e., Sufism) will deepen until the contemplative sees “the One alongside of whom there is nothing,” as our Hikmah puts it.

19. The Qur‘an affirms that God is nearer to man than his jugular vein, and in this Hikmah that imagery is assumed. One of the Names of the Divinity in Islam is “the Near” (*al-Qarib*); such being the case, there can be nothing that is “nearer” than He is.

20. This Hikmah draws attention to the mysterious interconnections between God and the world—the Absolute and the relative, Being and nonbeing, and so forth; but note that, for the author, the mystery is not in God so much as it is in the world, that derives whatever being it has from the pure Being of *Allah*, who alone is Real, everything else being illusory. The author is marveling at the illusory nature of the world, which “is” and “is not,” depending on how one looks at it. This ambiguity of the world derives from its nature as other-than-God.

21. To oppose Destiny or Fate is to oppose the divine Will, which is ignorance, whereas, according to the commentators, whatever happens in oneself or in the world around one is what God wills. It is a question here of what the Sufis call “the instant” (*al-waqt*), as the commentator Ahmad Zarruq points out: Whoever submits to His decision at that moment is saved; whoever opposes it by abandoning contentment and satisfaction with the divine Will at that instant suffers a fall or a relapse, so that, from an intellectual point of view, he manifests his ignorance also by desiring that a “fact” that has occurred be reversed, which is the same as desiring the impossible! Obviously, the author is saying, whatever appears in a given moment or instant is a fact that has to be accepted in the knowledge that it proceeds from the divine Will operating in every instant. The Sufi, by the way, is “the son of the instant,” or *Ibn al-Waqt*, which means that he lives in the “present,” not in the past or in the future; he lives in the here and now.

22. In view of what was said in Hikmah no. 17 about the moment and what no. 209 says about the irreplaceable past and the priceless present, this particular Hikmah alludes to the illusory nature of all procrastination, for, as Ibn ‘Ajibah points out, death may supervene!

23. One must accept whatever state God puts one in, more or less in



the spirit of no. 17, as Ibn 'Abbad says; but he adds that this does not include the transgression of commands on the part of an individual, since this is a different question altogether.

24. Qur'an 2:102, for this last citation; the other one in the text is of the author's own composition. In other words, the early fruits of the Path do not constitute the end; there is still more to come. The exterior beauties, or charms, of things are only indicative of their interior realities, that are much more "real." One must push on further and further in the process of interiorization and not stop at external forms.

25. This does not mean that the servant (*abd*) should not petition God for this or that; rather, he should not do so while thinking that he has been neglected, for he is constantly under surveillance. Nor should one betake oneself to creatures with the idea of seeking their aid, as if somehow this aid were apart from God's help, or as if this seeking could be accomplished with flattery and hypocrisy. On the contrary, His intervention operates in all domains; hence, one must be aware of this at all moments, and being aware of this, one must maintain a correct attitude toward God and toward one's fellowman.

26. This by way of instilling the notion that all depends on the divine Will, including such apparently insignificant things as the breaths of man, which are limited in number, as Ibn 'Ajibah says, so that when one's allotted number of breaths comes to an end, there ends one's life as one moves on to the Hereafter. If the breaths are counted, he asks, then what about one's steps, one's thoughts, and everything else?

27. The word "alterities" (*al-aghyar*) is a technical Sufi expression implying multiplicity and as such is characteristic of other-than-God, that is to say, it is the world insofar as it preoccupies the heart and prevents it from being exclusively attentive to the divine Presence. The world being multiple by its very nature, there is no point in looking forward to being free of its attractive pull; rather, one should be vigilantly attentive *now* to the Presence in the heart, for that is what really counts.

28. This Hikmah is related to no. 23, for it spells out the nature of the world, which is not God. Not being, on its own plane, the Divinity, it is necessarily compounded of joys and sorrows; God alone is pure bliss. Useless is it, then, to lament its nature, which is imperfection, the imperfection of the other-than-God. To want it to be perfect with the perfection of God is to seek for two absolute perfections; but this is *shirk*.

29. Ibn 'Abbad says that every seeker has a beginning and an end. The beginning has to do with his voyaging, which implies turning to God; the end has to do with his arriving, which implies his union with God. If he is illumined to turn to God in the beginning, he will be illumined in his union with God at the end; if he does not turn to God in the beginning and

relies instead on other-than-He, he will not be illumined.

30. The external forms mirror the internal essences; what a person has in his heart is manifested outwardly in his face and body, according to Ibn 'Abbad. It is not simply a question of his positive qualities, as Ibn 'Ajibah would put it, but also of his negative traits, his vices, which show themselves with the same clarity and can be "read" by the person who has the discernment of forms.

31. Gnosis takes its point of departure with the Real (*al-Haqq*, which also means "the Truth" and "God" and is one of the ninety-nine Names of *Allah*), not with the Creation (*al-Khalq*), which is, from the usual point of view, other-than-God; it thus works downward to the world from God, not upward from the world to God. It is theologians, philosophers, and others who argue syllogistically from the imperfection of things to the Perfection of God, from multiplicity (*al-athar*) to the divine Unity, and from the relativity of everything to the Absolute. But their argumentation is defective, for God is not "absent" at any given moment that one has to "prove" Him inferentially, nor is He so distant that it is via created things or multiplicity that one must "reach" Him. On the contrary, He is present and near—He is "here" and "now." We should start with Him, not with the world. Ibn 'Ajibah, in commenting on this Hikmah, mentions the two groups as being, on the one hand, the people of love, who have gnosis, sanctity, and direct vision, and, on the other hand, the people of service, who stop at the external shells and have no light of knowledge or understanding.

32. Qur'an 65:7.

33. Ibid. Those who have reached the end of the Path are blessed with graces and knowledge that they diffuse among others spontaneously; those who are voyaging do not have this superabundance of spiritual wealth. Ahmad Zarruq equates the two groups with the two mentioned in Hikmah no. 29: The sage who is united with God proceeds from Him; the initiate still voyaging toward God proceeds inferentially to Him.

34. Qur'an 6:92. This Hikmah really continues the previous themes—those who have the lights of confrontation being those who are united with God; those who have the lights of orientation being those voyaging toward Him. Ibn 'Ajibah takes the three stations of Islam, namely, *islam* ("submission"), *iman* ("faith"), and *ibsan* ("spiritual virtue"), as found in the famous *hadith* of the Prophet, and divides them up between the two groups. The lights of orientation, accordingly, are the lights associated with the stations of *islam* and *iman*, whereas the lights of confrontation are those associated with the station of *ibsan*. He does much the same thing for other well-known Sufi ternaries, such as "the Law, the Path, the Reality" (*ash-shari'ah, at-tariqah, al-Haqiqah*), where the first two belong to the lights



of orientation, the last one to the lights of confrontation.

35. Ahmad Zarruq says that it is in the nature of the ego to ignore vices and to seek hidden things, whereas it is the opposite that should be done.

36. Qur'an 6:18. God being Infinite, nothing can limit him, for there are not two Infinities. The Real cannot therefore be veiled by anything whatsoever; it is the individual who is veiled; his fallen nature has led him to believe that "something" can veil the Real, but this is an illusion. One should read this Hikmah while keeping in mind the words of Hikmah nos. 15 and 16. Shaykh Ibn 'Ajibah cites the words of his own master in explanation of this Hikmah: "Nothing but illusion (*al-wahm*) veils mankind from God, but illusion is an inexistent matter—it has no reality."

37. A triad of technical terminology is found here: *shu'a' al-basirah* ("the ray of light of the intellect"), *'ayn al-basirah* ("the eye of the intellect"), and *Haqq al-basirah* ("the Truth of the intellect"). These three correspond to another ternary, as pointed out by Ibn 'Ajibah in his commentary: *'ilm al-yaqin* ("the knowledge of certitude"), which is really theoretical doctrine; *'ayn al-yaqin* ("the eye of certitude"), which has to do with those progressing in the Path and who have more than just theoretical insight; and *Haqq al-yaqin* ("the Truth of certitude"), which has to do with those who have reached the end of the Path and possess the Truth through contemplation and direct vision. Ibn 'Ajibah also points to a hierarchic correspondence between the ternary mentioned in the Hikmah and another well-known ternary: the *'Alam al-Mulk* ("the World of the Kingdom"), which is the physical world of existence and corresponds to the eye of the intellect; the *'Alam al-Malakut* ("the World of the Realm"), the world of immaterial, psychic realities, of the world soul, which corresponds to the eye of the intellect; and the *'Alam al-Jabarut* ("the World of absolute Sovereignty"), which is the highest of the three worlds and corresponds to the domain of spiritual realities, where the Spirit is to be found, beyond the soul. There is, accordingly, a relationship, easily perceived, between these ternaries and the one mentioned in the footnote to Hikmah no. 31, namely, the Law, the Path, and the divine Reality (*shari'ah*, *tariqah*, *Haqiqah*). In all of these a hierarchic progression can be seen; in this particular Hikmah, the beginning, middle, and end of the contemplative path are traced out. Let us recall that the Truth in such phrases as "the Truth of the intellect" does not refer merely to a mental or conceptual image but rather to God as the ultimate Real independent of man and his thinking—the Real (*al-Haqq*) in Itself.

38. Sometimes this Hikmah is united with the previous one by way of describing the Truth of the intellect, the last stage of the Path, which implies the realization that there is nothing outside the Real. The Hikmah is really a *badith* except that the phrase "and He is now as He was" is consi-

dered to be an addition. The *badith* posits the absoluteness of the Real in Itself, without associates; and it implies the nothingness of other-than-God, a nothingness that is not merely a figure of speech, as one might be tempted to think.

39. Qur'an 22:46. By the "heart" is meant the clouded intelligence that does not discern the relativity of the world and its impermanence and that the Decrees of Destiny cannot be eluded: There is blindness in such a heart.

40. Qur'an 53:42. The person occupied with creatures and not with the Creator is trapped in multiplicity, and round and round he goes, without exit. The *badith* of the Prophet that is cited in the text points out the importance of intention (*niyyah*): One must deepen it, with God in view.

41. Qur'an 14:20. The Invocation (*dhikr*) in question is the primary spiritual means of realization in Sufism, the basic technique of concentration. It is the Invocation, inwardly or outwardly, of a Name of the Divinity in Islam, and especially of the supreme Name, *Allah*; under the guidance of a teacher, the Invocation becomes a permanent "prayer of the heart." The author describes herein, somewhat succinctly, different initiatic stages of the Invocation. Called the *dhikru 'llah* ("the Invocation of *Allah*"), this Sufi method of concentration brings to mind the *Japa-yoga* of Hinduism, the Jesus Prayer of the Hesychastic tradition of the Eastern Church, and the *Nembutsu* of Japan, all of which use a divine Name that is to be invoked, the goal being to concentrate on it permanently.

42. Inspiration is called *warid* (plural is *waridat*), and is defined by Shaykh Ibn 'Ajibah in his commentary on this Hikmah as "a divine light that God casts in the heart of the one He loves among His servants." Inspirations, for Ibn 'Ajibah, are of three types: inspirations that occur at the beginning of the Path, those that occur in the middle, and those that occur at the end, when union has taken place.

43. The lights mentioned here are spiritual in nature and coincide with the "inspirations" (*al-waridat*), and must not be confused with psychic lights in the soul nor even less with physical lights. The term *sirr* (plural is *asrar*) means the innermost center or being of an individual, much more subtle, says Ibn 'Ajibah, than "heart" (*qalb*), but both refer to one and the same thing, namely, the Spirit (*ar-Rub*); and he goes on to say that when the Spirit is purified completely and turns back to its origin in God it is called "mystery" (*sirr*).

44. The word *qalb* means "heart" and also, as a verbal noun, inverting or reversing, a turning inside out or outside in; thus, the heart can both progress in the Path and retrogress, depending on case.

45. Qur'an 10:58. We can do nothing without the grace of God.

46. The term *al-wahm* is polyvalent in signification and can mean



"illusion," "suspicion," "self-deception," and the like. Here it is the delusion that mankind has the power to harm or benefit and must be treated with flattery or other attitudes that lead to covetousness. Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq interprets *al-wahm* in the sense of imagination that causes an individual to fall into coveting. The following Hikmah speaks of the enslavement brought on by covetousness.

47. Qur'an 7:182. This is more fully explained in the next Hikmah (no. 66).

48. Qur'an 17:20. Nos. 67 and 68 deal with the universality of God's providential care for His servants.

49. Ibn 'Abbad says that the pleasure and felicity encountered in performing good deeds are their immediate fruits and are the signs of God's accepting such deeds.

50. Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq says that what God seeks from man is three things: emptying oneself of everything except Him; adorning oneself with what pleases Him; perserverance in both without letup or shortcoming till "you meet Him."

51. Ibn 'Abbad explains that the real gnostic would not be concerned with his symbolic allusion to begin with, since that would be involvement with what is other-than-God; and he has no symbolic allusion because of his extinction in God.

52. Contraction and expansion (*qabd* and *bast*) are purely spiritual states of being that befall the heart (*al-qalb*), according to Ahmad Zarruq, so that at times it is contracted, at times expanded, at times it is equilibrated. These states are in themselves spiritual but do have psychological repercussions in the soul, such as sadness and joy. They are alternating states along the Path, similar in their succession to the cycles of days and nights. Contraction is related to the fear of God, expansion to hope in God; but there are states beyond these.

53. Once again, as in no. 20, he draws attention to the exterior and interior aspect of things, the soul or the ego attaching itself to the exterior forms, the heart or the intelligence going straight to their interior essences.

54. Ibn 'Abbad says that when the light of certitude shines in the heart of a servant, the world is extinguished in his sight and is folded up in his thinking, and he sees the Hereafter present before him. Compare this Hikmah with no. 13, which develops another aspect of the same theme.

55. God's recompense, as Shaykh Ibn 'Abbad puts it, is not only in the Hereafter but also in this world—and now—for those servants whom He wishes to encourage in their efforts.

56. Ibn 'Ajibah comments that the seeker may flag during his voyage to the Divinity and become tired out in his striving; his ego overcomes him, as a result, and he commits a sin, which results in his downfall; but when he

risers from this fall, he could have such renewed dedication that it would take him all the way to the divine Presence. He cites the *badith*: "Many a sin has caused its perpetrator to enter Paradise!" When asked to explain how this could be, the Prophet, in speaking of the sinner and his sin, answered: "He never ceases being repentant over it, fleeing from it, and fearing his Lord, till he dies—and it causes him to enter Paradise!"

57. Man is totally dependent for his continued existence on God in an essential manner, as was pointed out in nos. 97 and 98. The two graces of "existence" and "sustenance" are absolutely necessary; if they were withdrawn, we would be reduced to nothingness; hence our indigence is total. The "accidents" referred to are such things as well-being, health, or the trials that come over us, such as illness and suffering, which are but reminders of the essential indigence that we tend to ignore.

58. It never vanishes because he knows that he is nothing by virtue of his gnosis that reveals to him the absoluteness of God; nor can he repose in anyone or anything but God for there is nothing "outside" of God.

59. The "lights of His created things" are the sun and the moon; the "uncreated lights of His attributes" are the divine qualities, such as Majesty, Beauty, Sublimity, and the like, according to Ibn 'Ajibah. The Sun of hearts is the immanent Spirit that gnosis unveils.

60. As the commentators say, the ways leading to God have been very clearly expounded; however, passion can overcome the mind, leading to blindness that impedes progress in the Path; and that is what is feared.

61. The "inner reality of holiness" (*sirr al-khususiyyah*), as explained by Ibn 'Ajibah, is the Light of the Truth in the hearts of those saintly servants of God who have been purified of all stain. Perfected human nature is like a sanctuary or a temple enveloping that interior holiness. "Lordship" (*rububiyyah*) has to do with the quality of God as Lord of the Creation, with all that this implies in the way of attributes; "servanthood" (*ubudiyyah*) is its complementary term, and refers to man's attitudes as the creature or servant of God, the gnostic being the perfect "servant."

62. As Ibn 'Ajibah puts it, not everyone who manifests miracles or charismatic signs (which would be, by the way, indications of his being among the chosen) has already achieved liberation from his imperfections and faults. These charismatic signs might come over him, according to Ibn 'Ajibah, for three reasons: to encourage him after a period of lassitude; to test him to see whether he will stand still or go further; to increase his certitude or the certitude of someone else in him.

63. There is a play on words here, litany being *wird* and inspiration *warid*, both coming from the same consonantal roots.

64. Ibn 'Ajibah explains that "sustenance" here means the lights of orientation for the voyagers and the lights of confrontation for those who



are united with God (see Hikmah no. 31), the sustenance being for the sake of the purification of the heart.

65. Devotees (*ubbad*) and ascetics (*zubbah*) are distinguished in this Hikmah from the gnostics (*arifun*). As Ibn 'Ajibah explains, the devotees are distracted from God by the sweetness of their devotions; the ascetics are distracted from God by their acts of asceticism; the gnostics see the Real in all things and hence are never absent from God.

66. Ibn 'Abbad points out that the acquisition of gnosis leads to permanent company with God, which in turn requires permanent contemplation; knowing that His servant has that contemplative state, God reveals to him His creatures and created things that issue from Him, as forms to be contemplated, and all this as a "relaxation" to His servant.

67. "Ritual prayer" must be distinguished from the Invocation (*dhikr*); the Qur'an states that the Invocation of *Allah* is greater than ritual prayer. Ritual prayer refers to the five daily prayers binding on all Muslims by the Law of Islam, and as such it is one of the Pillars of the religion, the others being the Testimony of Faith (*shahadah*), the Pilgrimage (*hajj*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*siyam Ramadan*), and the legal alms (*zakat*); occasionally, a sixth Pillar, Holy War (*jihad*), is added. Ritual prayer (*salat*) occurs at specific moments during the course of the day (see Hikmah no. 194 on this matter) and is accordingly in stark contrast with the uninterrupted nature of the *dhikr*.

68. As Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq points out, the doer of one's acts is God, the unique Agent; to seek recompense for a deed performed by Him is bad manners. See Hikmah no. 72 for the question of God's "acceptance" of deeds.

69. God's grace is supreme, says Ibn 'Abbad, so when He wants to manifest it to a servant He creates obedience within him and makes it sweet to him; then He attributes that obedience to the servant.

70. There is a play here on the word "habits" (*awa'id*) and "laws of nature" (*awa'id*): Islam considers miracles as ruptures of the laws of nature or of the "habits" of nature. So long as one's own bad habits have not been eliminated, it is useless to aspire to perform miracles.

71. An important Hikmah, it announces the incommensurable nature of spiritual realization: There can be no common measure between the individual's efforts to unite with the Absolute and the eventual results. It is the Infinite itself that intervenes within the finite to effect the union.

72. It is rare, says Ibn 'Ajibah, that the deeds of man be impregnated with sincerity; thus, God veils our imperfections in deeds through His kindly veiling and accepts them, however tarnished they might be.

73. Because, as Ahmad Zarruq explains, obedience can lead to self-

satisfaction, whereas disobedience leads to self-negation and the awareness that one is in need of God.

74. The beauty of God's veiling, according to Ibn 'Ajibah, is that he providentially covers His servant's imperfections with His qualities; consequently, whatever good qualities are in him do not belong to him.

75. Here the doctrine of illusion is presented to account for the veiling often mentioned in the book and in other Sufi works. See Hikmah no. 33 for a similar statement.

76. Without His bringing beings and things into existence, there would have been no Creation whatsoever (no macrocosm), and thus there would have been no perception of things by an individual (no microcosm). Had His Qualities been manifested in a pure state, instead of being progressively veiled by the degrees of reality as they descended down into our world, the Creation would have been annihilated.

77. As stated previously, the words "the Interior" (*al-Batin*) and "the Exterior" (*az-Zahir*) are two of the ninety-nine Names of *Allah* and are drawn from the Qur'an: "He is the First and the Last and the Exterior and the Interior" (57:3). This is one of the richest verses of the Qur'an and has often been used by the Sufis. God is the First "before" the Creation, just as He will be the Last after the Creation has been reabsorbed, or "after" the Creation. A spatial symbolism and a temporal symbolism are implied in the verse: The First and the Last suggest a circle closing in on its initial point of origin; the Interior and the Exterior suggest a central point and an outer circle or sphere. The Creation is manifested because He is the Interior, the hidden Source from which all manifestation proceeds. On the other hand, the Creation is hidden because He is the Exterior, or the Manifest, more manifest or more real than the symbolic nature of the world that points to Him. The exterior world, it should not be forgotten, is not the Exterior in Itself, but only a symbol of it on a different plane, otherwise it would be the same thing, which would be equivalent to abolishing the degrees of reality or of reducing everything created to its Principle. In the latter case, there would be no exterior world at all, but only "the Exterior" or "the Manifest," that is ontologically prior to the Creation. As Hikmah no. 16 says, in one of its many questions: "How can it be conceived that something veils Him, since He was the Manifest *before* the existence of anything?"

78. Qur'an 10:101. We meet again the distinction between the interior and exterior aspects of things, as we see in nos. 20 and 85. We must not stop at the forms of things, for they will imprison us if we do, and instead we must go straight to their essences, since these alone liberate our minds.

79. There are two perspectives here, depending on the point of departure. There is, first of all, the perspective of existence as such: The world



exists because it derives its reality from God, its Existentiator, its ontological Principle, without which it could not exist at all. Then there is, secondly, the perspective of the Principle as such: The world "is not" in any way whatsoever because there is nothing "outside" or "alongside" the divine Unity. On the one hand, the world is relatively real; on the other hand, it is unreal, or even nothing at all, for only the divine Unity is the Real (*al-Haqq*). One should not forget these two positions in trying to grasp our author's ideas; at times, he situates himself in one viewpoint, at times in another.

80. Qur'an 4:11. Compare this aphorism with no. 81. Note the equation of night with contraction and day with expansion.

81. The "lights" in question, says Ibn 'Ajibah, are the "inspirations" (*al-waridat*) and "revelations" (*al-kushufat*) that remove all veils. The distinction made in the Hikmah between "hearts" (*al-qulub*) and "innermost centers of being" (*al-asrar*) is one of degree; but ultimately, according to Shaykh Ibn 'Ajibah, terms such as "heart" (*qalb*), intelligence (*'aql*), Spirit (*Rub*), and Mystery or Secret (*Sirr*)—the last-named being the innermost center of being—are one and the same thing. The "lights" mentioned in this Hikmah and in nos. 152–155 are of course spiritual lights, not psychic or physical lights; the last-named are the ones that unveil the sensorial world around us. Ibn 'Ajibah, in speaking of the spiritual lights, classifies them according to a threefold division: First comes the weakest light, which is the light of the station of "submission" (*islam*), and resembles the faint light of the stars; then comes the stronger light, which is the light of the station of "faith" (*iman*), like the light of the moon; and finally comes the strongest light of all, which is the light of the station of "spiritual virtue" (*ihسان*), like the light of the sun. One might point out in passing, as did Ibn 'Ajibah in his commentary, that the ternary *islam-iman-ihسان*, in that order, is common to Sufism, whereas in exoteric Islam the progression is given as *iman-islam-ihسان* due to the dictum of the doctors of the Law that nothing is valid without "faith" preceding it.

82. The distinction is between sensorial light and intelligible light. The latter light is divisible into the three types mentioned in note 81.

83. See Hikmah no. 108 for another version of the same truth.

84. The "saints" mentioned here are the Shaykhs of the Path. Providence guides the seeker to the Shaykh so that ultimately he be united with God. The sign leading to the sage is the sign leading to God.

85. The particular distinction (*khususiyyah*), says Ibn 'Ajibah, might be asceticism, piety, a miracle, a gnostic intuition, and the like; but if, after receiving it, you should want others to know of it, then this is proof of a secret hypocrisy and of insincerity toward God.

86. The "nearness" mentioned has nothing to do with spatial distance,

as Ibn 'Abbad points out, but rather has to do with the encompassing nature of His Knowledge, Power, and Will.

87. The prior giving, as interpreted by Ibn 'Ajibah, is related to His eternal Knowledge before creatures were brought into being; and because all of the "giving" and the "depriving" has been settled from all Eternity, one's subsequent asking cannot be the cause of God's giving.

88. Ahmad Zarruq gives the reason for this by saying that secondary or contingent causes are created and posterior, while the nature of Eternity is that it is anterior, with nothing preceding it.

89. In Eternity, there is no "you," as Ibn 'Abbad puts it; thus, His providential care of the individual could not be caused by anything coming from him; he had not yet been created and was a pure nothingness.

90. Qur'an 2:105.

91. Qur'an 7:56. Since the care of Providence over its creatures is "already" settled, each one naturally sits back awaiting its emergence in himself; but the Qur'anic phrase clearly indicates that God chooses this or that person for His Mercy, thus excluding some from His providential care. Lest that provoke a general indifference and abandonment of effort, the Qur'an pinpoints those who fall under the care of Providence (or Mercy, which amounts to the same thing), namely, "the doers of good."

92. Creatures are subject to the Will of God, but His Will is not subject to anything in the Creation. A clarification having to do with asking, however, is in order at this point. One's asking takes place in the temporal world, but the giving has been fixed from all Eternity, "before" one asked. Thus, as he says in no. 168, a contingent thing such as asking cannot be the cause of His giving, for in Eternity, which has nothing to do with time, past or future, there is only "pure bestowing" and "sublime giving" (no. 169). This cannot be construed as a rejection on his part of asking, for he has said in no. 166 that one should ask for the sake of showing one's servanthood and fulfilling the rights due to God as Lord, or as possessor of Lordship. Moreover, by way of completing the picture, one's asking is itself subject to the divine Will, as he points out in this Hikmah, when he says that everything depends on the divine Will, which of course would include one's asking.

93. According to a *hadith* cited by the commentators, the Divinity is pictured as saying through the mouth of the Prophet these words: "He whose invocation of Me distracts him from asking Me—to him will I give the best of what is given to the askers."

94. Nos. 174–178 all deal with the question of spiritual poverty. The "need" or "indigence" of the novice is essential (no. 99); the need is a matter of self-effacement before God.

95. Qur'an 9:60. The "feast-days" and "gifts" mentioned in nos. 174



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and 177 are all the fruits of the Path, such as intuitions, blessings, virtues, and wisdom. These come to the degree that the ego is extinguished by poverty of the Spirit.

96. Ibn 'Ajibah points out that the attributes of "servanthood" (*ubudiyyah*) are four, to which correspond four attributes of "Lordship" (*rububiyyah*) in God. The four in the servant are poverty of Spirit, lowliness, impotence, and weakness; the four in God are Wealth, Sublimity, Power, and Strength.

97. Miracles can occur at the hands of someone who has yet to perfect himself spiritually, remarks Ibn 'Abbad, but the true miracle is the transformation of one's nature and the extinction of the ego.

98. The "fruits," according to Ibn 'Ajibah, are the virtues, the fulfilling of the rights due to God, and the like.

99. There are two groups, explains Ibn 'Ajibah—those who are veiled, and those who are unveiled. The first are the doctors of the Law, the second are the gnostics. When someone from the first group makes a mistake, he is silenced out of shame before God or fear of Him; when someone in the second group makes a mistake, he is not silenced because the misbehavior comes from himself whereas his expression comes from God; and indeed, this is only a way of speaking about the second group, for they witness only the behavior of God in themselves and hence their misbehavior could not silence them, for they are drowned in an ocean of graces and see nothing but Him in the world.

100. From Hikmah 183 to 188, the discussion revolves around the permission (*idhn*) that the Sufi sages receive to teach the Path to disciples. This particular Hikmah establishes the general rule that a person's speech betrays what he has in his heart and that it will affect others accordingly.

101. The latter case is that of the Shaykhs of the Path.

102. The "insight" here belongs to the person who has realization.

103. Ibn 'Abbad explains that he should not express them to anyone except his Shaykh. To express them is to give vent to his egocentric tendencies.

104. Ibn 'Abbad says that people are divided into two camps, as far as their daily nourishment is concerned: those who work for their nourishment and those who do not work for it but receive it instead at the hands of creatures. In this Hikmah, only the second group is mentioned and two conditions are imposed for taking things from others: that God be seen as the true Giver, and that the taking be done under the control of knowledge. In general, the commentators see in this Hikmah a reference to those who are subject to a life of mendicancy, those who live in "isolation" (*tajrid*), not to those who live in the world, working with their own hands to make a living.

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105. As Ibn 'Ajibah puts it, the gnostic sees only the Real and is in any case so near his Lord that he is ashamed to ask Him for something other-than-His. All the more would his shame be if he were to address himself to another creature of His!

106. This Hikmah is explained by no. 192, since obligatory deeds are those that weigh on the ego.

107. The five daily ritual prayers fall within specific times, as was said previously, but each prayer has a time span that permits the pious to choose within it their own moment of performing the prayer.

108. This is a *hadith* of the Prophet.

109. Qur'an 18:45.

110. The graces that come upon the seeker, from the grace of faith to the grace of guidance in the Path, should not go unrecognized, states Ibn 'Ajibah, even if that recognition be in the form of a simple expression praising God.

111. The "unsettling fear" has to do with the divine Majesty, which forces the novice to abandon his particular passion; the "restless desire" has to do with the divine Beauty, which creates an attractive force that pulls him out of his earthbound passion and directs him upward.

112. The affirmation of the Oneness of God (*tawhid*) demands increasing sincerity in the *faqir*: The false gods in him must go. The deed that is associationist is the one performed without God in view; the heart that is associationist is the one that loves other-than-God.

113. Ibn 'Ajibah, in explaining this Hikmah, says that the lights allowed to arrive are the lights of "faith" (*iman*); the lights that enter are the lights of "spiritual virtue" (*ibsan*). The person who has the former lights is not altogether devoid of worldly tendencies; the person who has the latter lights is devoid of all alterities. One will note that the author does not speak here of any lights belonging to the people of "submission" (*islam*), perhaps because it is only at the degree of faith (*iman*) that one can start speaking of "lights" properly so-called, or of real lights in a lofty sense.

114. See Hikmah no. 13, which asks: "How can the heart be illumined while the forms of creatures are reflected in its mirror?"

115. Ibn 'Ajibah says that union with God is through the actualization of knowledge of His Being by absence from one's self and from all that which is other-than-God. It is therefore not a question of material or sensorial union with God in a pantheistic sense.

116. Qur'an 75:18-19. Inspirations arrive synthetically. It is only after retention or assimilation that their explanation can be detailed. The Qur'anic verse cited is addressed to the Prophet and refers to the revelation of the Qur'an.

117. Qur'an 27:34.



118. Qur'an 21:18. Divine inspirations have a purifying effect on the soul; they are also illuminative, since they destroy illusions and falsehood.

119. Still another repetition of a theme that runs throughout the book, namely, that nothing veils God, as we find, for example, in Hikmah no. 16.

120. See nos. 52–54 for other developments of this Hikmah on inspirations and their purposes.

121. Because if one had found Him, as Shaykh Ahmad Zarruq says, then all that is other-than-He would be of no moment, and if one were united to Him, then the intimacy that results would suffice against the feeling of estrangement at other-than-He.

122. According to Ibn 'Ajibah, this Hikmah has to do with the post-humous states, the felicity being the contemplation of the Lord, and the suffering being the veiling that impedes that contemplation.

123. Worries and sadnesses, in the opinion of Ibn 'Abbad, come from self-consciousness; once this goes, inner vision is possible.

124. The term "post" also means "saintliness," and thus the contrast between the two, as Ibn 'Ajibah would say, is between the impermanence of the former, which has to do with the world, and the permanence of the latter, which has to do with the Hereafter.

125. "Beginnings" and "exteriors" tempt the ignorant man; "endings" and "interiors" force the intelligent man to be abstinent (Ibn 'Abbad). See Hikmah no. 85 for a similar thought.

126. Beneficial knowledge, in the thinking of Ibn 'Abbad, is knowledge of God, His Attributes, His Names, and knowledge of the acts of devotion and how to act before Him.

127. Both this Hikmah and the following one describe the type of knowledge that is beneficial to man, namely, the one accompanied by the fear of God. If there is no fear of God, then, as Ibn 'Ajibah would say, there is no good whatsoever in the knowledge, and eventually it works against man.

128. To understand this Hikmah aright, we have to know that, in Arabic, the term "humility" (*tawadu'*) also means "lowliness." Thus, the individual strives to bring his "self" low, while the self, to paraphrase Ibn 'Ajibah, seeks loftiness. For the individual who has a certain spirituality, all things in the creation seem alike, whereas for those who have separative knowledge, all things have their hierarchic level. These last see themselves as having a distinction over and above the other things; they attribute lowliness to themselves. But the gnostics, who have a unitive knowledge, never attribute any distinction to themselves at all; they see things on a plane of equality and attribute neither lowliness nor loftiness to themselves.

129. The humble man, according to Ibn 'Abbad, is aware of his imperfections, and this awareness forces him to see himself as being below what he does.

130. This humility arises in the gnostics, explains Ibn 'Ajibah, because the contemplation of the Divinity implies the extinction of themselves.

131. He means by "believer" in this Hikmah the perfectly realized sage who sees every excellence in himself as proceeding from his Lord.

132. The "arenas of the soul" are all those interior struggles against the egocentric tendencies of the self that the contemplative must go through. It is this interior holy war that constitutes progress or movement in the Path, and not the traversing of some imaginary "distance" between man and God.

133. Man is a "microcosm," explains Ibn 'Abbad, and thus he contains in himself the mysteries or secrets of all created things, whether superior or inferior, spiritual or physical.

134. In commenting on this Hikmah, Ibn 'Ajibah speaks of the three fundamental degrees of reality, the *Mulk*, the *Malakut*, and the *Jabarut*, or the physical world, the psychic world, and the spiritual world, the last incorporating, not only the realities of a paradisiacal nature, but also the uncreated realities within God. In the process of realization, the gnostics perceive the *Mulk* as reabsorbed into the *Malakut*; and with greater refinement of perception, they see the *Malakut* as reabsorbed into the *Jabarut*, so that, in the final analysis, there is only the *Jabarut* that remains as the uniquely Real, the entire Cosmos having no hold whatsoever on the sages. Not so is the case of those individuals who have no unitive knowledge at all, but only separative knowledge—for them, illusion is at work and the *Mulk* veils them from God.

135. Human nature as such, according to Ibn 'Ajibah, is like the night; when the solar nature of God's Lordship (*rububiyyah*) rises within man, it is like the sun shining in the night, giving the appearance that the night, now become day, is itself luminous; but this is not so. Likewise is sanctity in man: The luminous nature of the Spirit can so overwhelm the individuality as to transform it totally into light; even so, that light is of transcendent origin and does not belong to man.

136. There is a distinction between the ecstatic contemplative (*majdhub*), who is drawn by celestial Attraction (*al-Jadhb*) from the very beginning, and the voyager (*salik*), the methodical initiate, who experiences from the outset the problems and difficulties of the Path; the former is "drunk," the latter is "sober." Ibn 'Ajibah explains that the saintly sages are of two kinds: those who begin with celestial Attraction without any effort on their part, then return to voyaging; and those who begin with voyaging (*suluk*), that is to say, the normative Path, then the celestial Attraction overtakes them. In this Hikmah, the phrase "created things" (*athar*) means the acts of God in the world; these multiple acts proceed from the divine Names and even point to them as to their origins. Likewise, the Names point to the Qualities, such as the Living, the Knowing, the Willing, and the like. They



in turn point to the divine Essence, from which everything proceeds. For the ecstatic, it is the divine Essence that appears first; then come the Qualities, and afterwards the Names, and finally the created things; so his way is a progressive descent (*tadallin* or *tanazzul*). The exact opposite is the course of the voyager: He starts with the created things; then come the Names, and afterwards the Qualities, and finally the divine Essence; so his way is a progressive ascension (*taraqqin*). Ibn 'Ajibah states that the one who has experienced the progressive ascension is more reliable in guiding others in the Path than the one who has experienced the opposite; the reason for this is that the *salik* has undergone the difficulties and hardships of the Path, while the *majdhub* has not. For most people in the Path, the initiatic voyaging (*suluk*) is normal, followed by celestial Attraction (*al-Jadhb*), whereas the case of the *majdhub* is rare. Ibn 'Ajibah also notes that the ascension is from the *Mulk* to the *Malakut* to the *Jabarut*, in the sense of a progressive reabsorption from the lowest level of reality to the highest. The "return" or "descent" is presumably the reverse: from the *Jabarut* to the *Malakut* to the *Mulk*.

137. The "invisible world" mentioned here is the Hereafter.

138. A similar idea is presented in Hikmah no. 72.

139. Ibn 'Abbad says that the methodical "voyager" (*salik*) is the one whose invocation precedes his illumination, whereas the "ecstatic" (*majdhub*) is the one whose illumination precedes his invocation.

140. That which appears externally comes from an internal source, as the author has already explained in Hikmah no. 28.

141. "Those with Him," as Ibn 'Ajibah says, are the angelic hosts.

142. These two kinds of meditation belong to two groups, according to Ibn 'Ajibah: The first meditation belongs to those still traveling toward God with the lights of orientation; the second belongs to those who are united with Him and have direct vision.

143. Qur'an 17:80.

144. The hidden associationism of dependence has to do with secondary causes, or creatures, as Ibn 'Ajibah points out: One depends on them and not on God as such.

145. This is a description of the perfect sage.

146. A'isha, one of the wives of the Prophet, was falsely accused of adultery. The phrase "when her innocence was revealed through the tongue of the Prophet" refers to the Qur'anic verses (24:11-20) dealing with the scandal and her exoneration.

147. Qur'an 31:14.

148. The "refreshment of the eye" (*qurrat al-'ayn*) is a classic expression in Arabic which also means "joy," "pleasure," "the eye's delight," etc.

149. Qur'an 10:58.

150. Qur'an 6:92.

151. Qur'an 6:44.

152. Qur'an 10:58.

153. Qur'an 6:92.

154. This is not a Qur'anic verse but merely a tradition the author is passing on to the reader.

155. One will recall here what the author has already mentioned about "essential indigence" in Hikmah no. 99.

156. Ibn 'Ajibah explains this discourse by saying that it alludes to the alternation of states coming over a servant, such as poverty and wealth, ignorance and knowledge, belief and disbelief, contraction and expansion, and so forth. Useless is it to repose in one state, for another one may suddenly arrive. Were he to cling to His "giving," it might disappear in an instant; were he to despair during trials, they too might vanish quickly.

157. God has attributed to Himself these qualities in the Qur'an; but He is gentle and kind "before" the appearance of creatures.

158. A person's virtues, according to Ahmad Zarruq, are strewn with defects, to begin with; hence, his vices cannot but be vices, being imperfections as such. Likewise, his interior realities, such as states or stations or ecstatic experiences, do not belong to him, given the intrinsic poverty of his nature; so his pretensions are really pretensions, with nothing substantial hidden in them.

159. The same theme is to be found in Hikmah no. 29.

160. Qur'an 66:8.

161. The Knowledge mentioned here, according to Ibn 'Abbad, is that which is given to the elect; the Name is the divine Name guarded from all alterities.

162. Those possessed by "attraction" (*al-jadhb*) are the lovers of God, for whom everything is easy, as Ibn 'Abbad explains.

163. "Contentment" is an attribute of God, and its root in God is His eternal nature, so there can be no cause for it in Him, says Ibn 'Abbad.

164. God's betaking Himself to His throne is a Qur'anic image; here it is a question of the All-Mercifulness and the throne, and this assumes the following verse from the Qur'an as a given: "The All-Merciful, who on the throne is established" (20:5). The "throne" is a cosmic principle that presides over the world from a central point of authority. The "throne" is also seen as an encompassing reality, enveloping the created world; but it is itself enveloped by the All-Mercifulness. To say that created things are annihilated by created things is to say that the universe is reabsorbed into its cosmic principle, the throne. The all-encompassing spheres of light, as Ibn



## NOTES

'Ajibah explains, are the lights of the divine Qualities, that obliterate all alterities, namely, the throne and all that it contains, so that all that remains is the radiance of the Divinity in Itself.

165. "He is the First and the Last and the Exterior and the Interior" (Qur'an 57:3).

## Glossary